

VOLUME 4
NUMBER 9
FANTASTIC ADVENTURES
SEPTEMBER
1944

THE BOTTLE IMP *by* Dwight V. SWAIN

fantastic

ADVENTURES

SEPTEMBER 25c



GODDESS of the FIFTH PLANE

by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN



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ADVENTURES

TRADE MARK REGISTERED

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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "Goddess of the Fifth Plane"

Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, depicting "Atlas—The God of Strength"

Illustrations by H. W. McCauley; Magarian; Ned Hadley; L. Raymond Jones; Robert Fuqua; Rod Ruth; Brady

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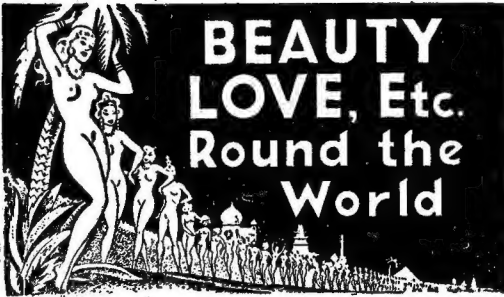
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SEPTEMBER,
1942

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VOLUME 4.
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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

THERE'S a little Irish ditty or rhyme which goes: Inagain Outagain Finnegan or something like that. Except for the fact that it seems rather apt when used to describe something we're going to talk about in a moment, it has very little to do with fantasy. But it does describe artist H. W. McCauley to a tee! You see, it's this way:

FIRST he was in the army, then he was out. First we sighed because the Mac Girl was lost to us, then we smiled because we weren't going to lose her after all. Then suddenly, when we had begun to have dreams of plenty of lovely gals on our covers, bingo, Finnegan was Inagain! And that's what we have to say now. McCauley is scheduled to leave for the army in a few days. And with him goes the Mac Girl. All except the one you see on this month's cover and two more he managed to paint for us before that pesky current of aerial vagary, the draft, whisked him from his easel.

JUST to cover the covers for this month and get them out of the way, Atlas and his golden apples, and his "dependency" the Earth, are pictured on the back cover, painted by Frank R. Paul. We think you'll consider this series a valuable addition to your collection of Paul paintings.

IN this issue we present a story by Don Wilcox which he likes very much. He wrote it around an illustration by Magarian, which we also believe the author likes very much. In fact, we'll give it to him as a souvenir, and in recognition for writing a yarn that we, the editors, will personally remember for a long time! By all means don't fail to read "An Angel With Four Faces" by your favorite writer of fantasy.

THIS month a comparative newcomer to the ranks of top-notch pulp writers comes into his own with a peach of a yarn. It's Dwight V. Swain with "The Bottle Imp" which is one of those yarns that comes along once in a blue moon. Now you've all heard of the "spirit" in a bottle of whiskey, but we doubt if you've seen him very often, unless you want to admit over-indulgence (we've seen him a couple of times!) Well, here's your chance to meet him without the discomfort of a hangover. The only hangover you'll get from this story is a pleasant memory that'll linger

in your fancy. Do it again, Dwight V. Swain!

LEFTY FEEP is in this issue again—hey! Come back here and finish this column! Don't be that way. Save the good things for last! Yep, better read Feep last this month. Because when you get through rolling on the floor and laughing, you'll be through reading for awhile—until the tears clear out of your eyes! "Son of a Witch" by Robert Bloch keeps our newest "hit" character rolling 'em in the aisles. And as a piece of great good news, we'll have Feep with us every month, if you like him that well!

ARTIST MAGARIAN is one fellow we like to see stroll into our office, because every time he does so, it means a swell illustration is laid on our desk. Those in this issue are just samples of the work he has on tap. He's developed a style all his own, and it's growing more distinctive every day. No longer can we liken him to Virgil Finlay, the old master. Each of these artists is master in a distinctive style—Finlay certainly already master of his, and Magarian making almost phenomenal strides towards the same mastery of his own technique.

COMING soon are several Finlay illustrations which we've spent hours looking at—they're that good! Stories are being written around them, and as soon as we can present them, we'll pass the whole works on to you. Just have a little patience, and it'll be worth it.

MAX OVERTON, a newcomer to our ranks, crashes our companion magazine, *Amazing Stories* also with the September issue. He sort of covers every angle when making a debut, eh? We think you'll like him.

OLD favorite Polton Cross comes back too, with a story that you might say should be in our companion magazine, but it's so fantastic that we disregarded the spaceship angle, and ran it where it really belongs, in the fantasy circle. Let us know what you think of stories like this. They are Polton Cross' best work, peculiar to him only, and much like his popular "The Man From Hell" of several years ago.

WE think you'll be pleased with the McCauley interior illustrations in this issue too. Ordinarily Mac only "covers" for us, but these

illustrations were something we simply had to buy and pass on to you.

INCIDENTALLY next month we will present the Mac Girl in person, in our "Introducing The Author" department, together with artist McCauley and a biography of each. So take a good look at the front cover. Next month you'll see the photo from which the cover was painted. Yes, actual living models pose for these covers (and most times—keep this under your hat!—in the nude). Nope, sorry, this Mac Girl's wearing a bathing suit! We can't give you *everything*, can we?

WE'RE sort of confused about a fantastic fact that came to our attention the other day. We'd been brought up to believe that the thing to do if you wanted something to grow fast and big was to put it into a hothouse. But now we learn that there's really no basis in fact for this "superstition." In fact, it's the other way around.

Science is now convinced that birds, insects, and animals, as well as humans, who inhabit the northern latitudes are larger than members of the same species inhabiting the warmer regions.

Moreover, although their bodies are larger, the northern members of the species have shorter protrusions such as tails, legs, ears, beaks, wings, etc. from their bodies than do their southern relatives.

The reason for these shorter protrusions is that they radiate less heat and this is more important to the northern species than it is to the southern ones who live in a climate where the conservation of body heat is not so important.

TO prove this theory, one scientist took two butterfly "eggs" from a medium climate and subjected one to cold and the other to heat during their development stage. The chilled pupa developed into a butterfly closely resembling members of the northern species while the heated pupa developed into a butterfly resembling the southern species.

This is just one more example of how Nature takes care of her children and provides each with a means of meeting life's dangers. (Aw cut it out, readers, *that's* what our source of information said—and we couldn't resist repeating it. And we haven't had any "morals" in our column for a long time—not even about kind, thoughtful Mama Nature!)

EVERY time we read a story and wonder whether it's good, or bad, or whether we are just indisposed, we think of one of the greatest frauds committed against the American housewife. This is the practice of many grocers selling storage eggs as "strictly" fresh eggs. Try as they did, the Board of Health officials were stumped when they tried to detect the fraud and

punish the offenders . . . that is, until science stepped in with a helping hand.

The eggs under suspicion are now subjected to an ultra-violet light. The radiation is visible to the human eye, but substances will give off various colors when held in this light. A really fresh egg, under the ultra-violet light will give off a distinctive red color, not so fresh eggs a blue color, and the older the egg, the deeper the blue becomes.

Now if only we had such a method for telling how good a story was!

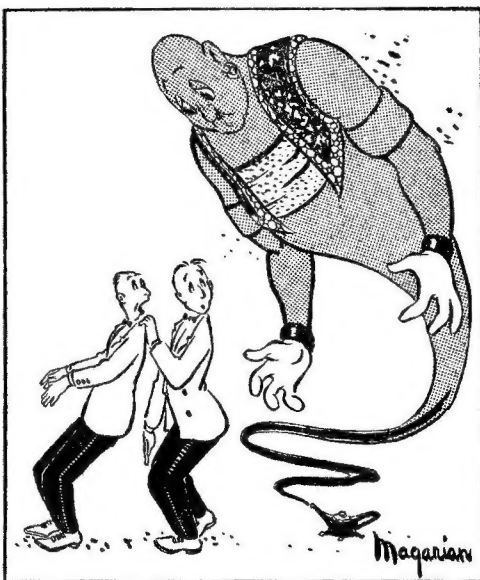
THE next time you get a shock from petting your cat, spray water on him! Or when you walk across that heavy wool carpet, and then jolted the dickens out of the visitor at the door when you shook hands with him, spray water on the carpet. Then duck what your wife throws at you!

But it's true. Static electricity can be rendered harmless by water vapor or steam. Cats don't "crackle" on a damp day.

The real value of this scientific discovery is in preventing those disastrous explosions and fires that are caused by static electricity sparks in places like grain elevators, flour mills, cement mills, etc. The answer is in a system of air conditioning with a small amount of water vapor. Static electricity can be caused to leak away gradually, making it harmless, by the presence of moisture.

So next time you clean hubby's suit with an inflammable liquid, and the house is full of explosive fumes, and you sit down to fondle the household pet, get out the atomizer and spray him a bit. It'll save you a blowout!

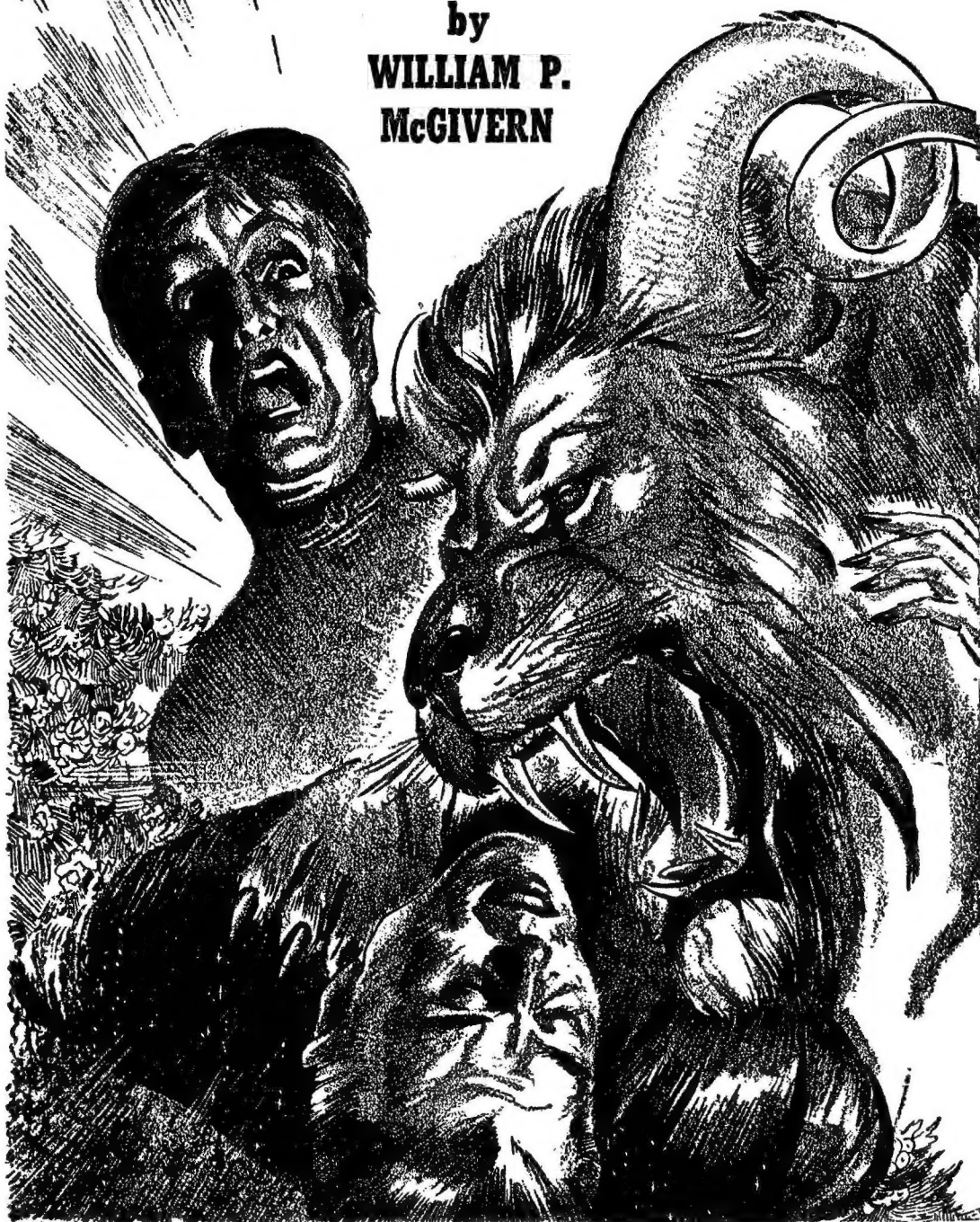
(Concluded on page 90)



"Isn't this an awful lot of trouble just for a telephone number?"

GODDESS of the

by
**WILLIAM P.
McGIVERN**



The horned lion's jaws gaped wide . . .

FIFTH PLANE



Vance Cameron was hurled into a world on another plane when he looked at the mysterious painting

THE valet entered the bedroom quietly and, after a glance at the young man who lay sleeping there, tip-toed to the window and adjusted the Venetian blinds.

Slanting bars of afternoon sunlight poured into the room, falling across the face of the sleeper.

The valet watched hopefully, but

as the young man continued to sleep peacefully, he sighed and walked to the side of the bed.

"It's five o'clock, sir," he said, bending over and shaking the young man's shoulder.

Vance Cameron opened his eyes sleepily and yawned.

"Five o'clock, eh?" he muttered. He

ran a hand tiredly through his brown, rumpled hair and hoisted himself on one elbow. After a glance at the clock on the night table, he yawned again and swung his legs out of the bed. He grinned up at his valet who was watching him impassively.

"I haven't slept this late in years," he said. "I can hardly believe it. I'll be completely spoiled when this furlough is over."

He stood up and stretched luxuriously.

"I'll have a bath and a bite to eat, then maybe I'll feel like a human being again."

"Certainly, sir." The valet smiled and started for the door.

Vance removed his pajama top, revealing a pair of wide, heavily muscled shoulders that rose like a wedge from lean, flat hips and stomach. He was tall and proportionately built. His face was lean, tanned and serious, but his gray eyes were sparkingly alive and there was humor in the slight upward twist of his lips.

At the door the valet paused.

"I forgot to ask you, sir, what you wished done with the picture?"

Vance looked at him in slight surprise.

"What picture?" he asked.

An expression of doubt appeared on the valet's face.

"Why, the picture in the living room, sir. I thought—I assumed that you brought it in with you this morning. It was there when I went in to straighten up."

Vance shook his head.

"Nope, it's not mine. Maybe it was delivered by mistake."

"I don't think so, sir. That is, I hardly see how it could have been. An expressman would have rung the bell. It isn't likely that someone would have just walked in and left the picture

there. Besides it's quite a large picture."

"Hmmm," Vance said. "The mystery deepens, doesn't it? Well, we'll just have to wait until someone comes around and claims it. In the meantime, I'm more interested in something to eat than I am in a mysterious picture. I'll have a look at the thing when I've had my shower, but you get started on breakfast, or rather supper."

"Certainly, sir," his valet said. He left the room quietly.

FIFTEEN minutes later, Vance, showered and shaved, and dressed in a casually fitting tweed suit, strolled into the littered living room of his apartment.

That room reflected his personality more definitely than any other in the apartment. In it were bric-a-brac and curios collected from the odd corners of the world in his travels. Gourds and weapons from the lost civilization of the Incas, tiny, bejeweled daggers from Persia, lamps from China, grotesque voodoo dolls from Haiti—all of these and many more, representing the odd and the strange from almost every nation of the globe, were scattered about the room, creating a cosmopolitan atmosphere of unbelievable weirdness.

Vance Cameron had trod the highways of the world for ten years, inquisitively poking his head into the darkest corners of every land. And when the vultures from Berlin had swept over London in those dark September days, Vance had begun his greatest adventure—as a pilot in the grimly battling R.A.F.

This was his first furlough in more than two years of sky battling. As he stood in the center of his bizarre living room, he thought ironically that he deserved a little peace and quiet and contentment.

But he obviously wasn't going to get it. Not, at least, until he had straightened out the mystery of the picture his valet had mentioned.

The picture had caught and held his eye the moment he entered the room. He was standing now facing it, studying its detail and composition carefully.

The painting was framed in heavy, gleamingly black wood and was leaning against the wall at a slight angle.

Vance lit a cigarette and frowned thoughtfully. Although he was no artist, he could appreciate that the painting was a marvelous piece of work, life-like, vivid and captivating.

The dominant figure on the canvas was a girl. She had been painted life-size, and Vance realized that it would have been an artistic crime to have minimized her dimensions.

She was tall and slender with a glorious halo of blonde hair that waved back from her pale, high forehead and fell ripplingly to her shoulders. Her eyes were great and wide and strangely troubled. The clothes that partly concealed her slim body were barbaric and strange, but they only enhanced her glorious, strangely compelling beauty.

Her hand was resting lightly on the golden mane of a great beast that resembled a lion, except for the blunt, curling horns that sprang from its magnificent head.

THERE was a quality of noble grandeur about the beast. Great liquid eyes stared solemnly, almost questioningly at Vance, and the majestic head was proudly raised, as if responding to the light touch of the girl's hand.

Vance stared long and thoughtfully at the painting. There was a feeling, a quality, a reality to the picture that disturbed him strangely.

He was still standing before the bar-

baric painting when his valet entered.

"Your supper is ready, sir," he said.

Vance didn't answer and the valet cleared his throat.

"Supper, sir."

Vance started slightly. He turned, looked at his valet as if he were seeing him for the first time.

"Oh, yes," he said vaguely. He shook his head as if trying to shake off a reluctant memory. He didn't know what was wrong with him. The painting was so beautiful and so strange that he must have lost himself in contemplation.

He ate supper, paying little attention to what he was putting in his mouth. There was a peculiar excitement running through his veins. He wanted to study the mysterious picture, examine it carefully and thoroughly, but somehow he felt as if he shouldn't.

He was able to smile a little at himself for that idea. He felt curiously excited and unsettled. The sensation was not exactly a novel one, for it had always come to him when he'd seen Messerschmitts diving at him out of the blinding sun, or when he was on perilous reconnaissance flights over Berlin. It was not fear, but rather a quickening of his perceptions, an expectation and invitation to danger.

But why such a sensation should come to him now was a question he was unable to answer.

He finished his supper and returned to the living room. It was almost dark now, and leaping shadows danced in the corners of the room. Vance turned on a few soft lights.

In the pale illumination the bizarrely furnished room was indescribably beautiful, but the most compelling of all the objects was the life-size painting of the girl and the mighty golden beast that stood at her side like a devoted dog.

Vance walked slowly toward the picture and stopped within a few feet of it. For several minutes he regarded it steadily, but found it impossible to view the picture as a whole, for his gaze swung inevitably to the girl and her great, smouldering, troubled eyes.

He looked steadily into her eyes, marveling at the swirling smoky lights that danced in their depths, their swiftly changing colors too delicately shaded to define.

FOR several minutes Vance studied the painting. In the semi-darkness of the room there was something unnatural about it, as if its colors glowed more deeply and flashed more brightly in the darkness.

To him now, the picture seemed to be the only object in the room. It dominated every other object by its magnificent reality. Vance frowned and shook his head. He wasn't the type to lose himself in contemplation. He had seen the great artistic masterpieces of the world during his travels, but they had never impressed him as did this picture.

The tall slender girl in the painting was the most ethereally beautiful creature he had ever seen, but it was the haunting, troubled look in her great eyes that lent her the air of mystery and seductive glamor.

And the great beast at her side was an unparalleled work of art. Every stroke of the artist's brush had caught the nobility, the grandeur, the fierceness of the mighty beast; and at the same time its humble devotion to the tall viking-blond girl was evident in every line of the great, heavily-thewed body.

Vance was unaware of the passage of time. His valet entered the room to announce that he was going out for the night, and Vance waved him away

with an abstracted hand.

Vaguely he heard a door slam, and he realized he was alone in the darkened apartment. But still he stood in the center of the dark living-room, gazing at the painting.

The city noises that drifted faintly to his ears, seemed to fade gradually away, to lose themselves in the blackness of the night.

Vance moved closer to the picture. His eyes met those of the girl in the painting and he stared steadily, intently and longingly into them.

Then he noticed something that sent a shiver down his spine, and felt the perspiration standing out on his brow.

For the expression in the girl's eyes had suddenly seemed to change. Instead of the troubled, haunted gaze, there was, it seemed, a strange transformed light of anticipation, and of voiceless hope that lighted flames of dancing light in her glorious eyes.

OBEYING a compulsion that was beyond definition Vance moved slowly toward the picture, his thoughts confused and whirling. He seemed caught in a force, a will stronger than his own. Had he been hypnotized, his actions could not have been more automatic, more rigidly directed.

But he was not alarmed; rather, he was enormously excited. The face of the girl was blazing radiantly now, as if reflecting the glow of an inner fire.

Vance stood as if poised on the brink of a steep cliff. Behind him was darkness and oblivion, but before him, in the face of the girl, in the voiceless hope that gleamed in her eyes, in the tremulous smile that seemed ready to break on her lips, he saw life and hope and beauty and danger.

He advanced another step toward the picture, and the light in the girl's eyes grew warmer. The radiance of her face

was like the sun at noon-day.

Entranced, mesmerized, Vance stumbled forward, covering the last few steps in a rush. There were swirling lights before his eyes, and his heart was hammering like a trip-hammer against his ribs. The girl's face, her entire figure, was transfigured with the smile that seemed to break over her face like the sun rising on a gray dawn.

Vance felt himself falling forward. He seemed to be losing consciousness. A wall of blackness was closing on him from all sides, and there was nothing but the slender figure of the girl, as beautiful and dramatic as a slim bright flame, between his falling body and that darkness.

Then the picture came to life!

EVEN in his numbed state Vance recognized the sudden expression of terror that spread over the girl's face, destroying her smiling beauty. She shrank back, but underlying her terror there was a fearlessness and a courage that was as bright as a gleaming sword.

Vance heard a snarling, deep chested roar, and with his last conscious glance, saw the great beast at the girl's side crouching to spring. The muscles of the mighty animal bunched under its tawny hide and its eyes gleamed with rage.

But at a touch of the girl's hand, the beast backed away and then the two incredible figures, the glorious girl and the golden lion, wheeled and disappeared.

At that moment Vance fell forward into the illimitable blackness of a depthless, timeless, ageless abyss.

CHAPTER II

A Strange World

VANCE CAMERON awoke slowly. For several moments he seemed sus-

pended in a hazy, flickering limbo; but slowly and gradually the mists cleared from his eyes and he saw a vast distant red sky above his head, in which two mighty green suns burned brilliantly.

He realized that he was lying on his back. He shut his eyes against the searing green light of the dual suns and tried to collect his wildly scattered thoughts.

All he could remember, all he could bring into focus was that moment when the eyes of the girl in the painting had suddenly come alive, glowing with warm, encouraging light, and he had moved toward her like a sun-blighted traveler toward an oasis.

Then he recalled what had happened. She had cringed and a look of terror had spread over her beautiful features; the mighty beast at her side had snarled in rage.

Vance shook his head dazedly. He felt as if he were poised on the precipice of sanity, but that at any instant his mind might plunge into the black and unplumbed depths of sheer madness.

In his mind's eye he could see the girl and beast, magnificent and noble, their courage and spirit standing forth in every line of the painting.

But was it all some mad dream?

With an effort he raised himself on one elbow and opened his eyes. The scene that met his eyes was one of rugged magnificence, of incomparably wild grandeur. A mighty forest of towering trees stretched away to his left, but they were like no trees that he had seen before in his life. Their boles were incredibly thick and their majestically spreading tops seemed to merge with the blazing red sky. They were purple and green in color but the shades ran together, mingling and merging in a bewildering, eye-dazzling pattern.

Shafts of green light from the great emerald suns slanted through their tow-

ering tops, criss-crossing in geometric squares and angles. Where the slanting shafts of light intersected they fused into blazing spots of color and these luminous balls of light winked against the darkness of the forest like Christmas tree ornaments.

VANCE turned from this bewilderingly unreal scene and saw, to his right, a narrow, uneven roadway winding up a ragged, mountainous slope and disappearing into a gulley-like cleft in the highest of the jagged ridges. The ground under him was composed of a black, glinting, shale-like substance and the distant mountains seemed to be of the same material.

His mind reeled dizzily as he studied the barren, bewildering terrain. There were no answers to the questions that hammered at his brain.

What was this place? How had he come here? And the gloriously beautiful golden girl? Had she been real, or was she only the product of his disordered imagination?

Frowning, he climbed to his feet. Carefully he explored his arms and legs. Except for a general feeling of impotent helplessness, he seemed to have received no damage from his transition to this mysterious place.

As he stood there, turning over in his mind the insoluble problems that his predicament presented, he heard a clattering noise in the distance.

The sharply reverberating sound shattered the stillness with startling abruptness. Vance wheeled and saw that two human figures had appeared from one of the narrow gashes in the mountainous slope.

They were mounted on huge, awkward, four-legged beasts, and it was the thundering of hoofs on the hard, rocky ground that had caused the strident clattering noise.

The two men rode toward Vance at an easy lope. They were attired in flame-colored garments with gaudy green sashes and trappings. Their broad shoulders were covered with metal plates that glinted dully in the light of the blazing green suns.

When they were within a dozen feet of Vance they reined their mounts to a stop. One of the men wore a full dark beard that covered the lower half of his powerfully cast face. His eyes, coal-black and coal-hard, glowered at Vance from under low, beetling brows.

The other man was smaller than his companion and his face was clean-shaven, revealing thin, finely molded features and a well-shaped, but weak jawline. His eyes were pale and large and they did not meet Vance's squarely.

The thick-shouldered rider with the dark beard and hard, boring eyes spoke first, and his voice was a heavy guttural growl.

"Who are you?"

VANCE stiffened, for the words had been spoken in English. And, for some reason, it seemed incongruous to hear that language spoken in these wild, barbaric surroundings.

The two men, he saw, were studying him carefully, almost anxiously. There was something so intent and watchful in their gaze that he instinctively set himself on guard. He saw the two riders exchange looks, then the smaller one, with the thin narrow face, turned to him.

"You do not need to be alarmed," he said. His voice smooth and quiet. "We are friends. I am known here as Numari." He waved a slim, negligent hand toward his companion. "This is Rakar, my Grand Agent."

Vance listened carefully to the man's words. They were precise and correct, but they were spoken with a peculiar

accent, as if the speaker had little experience with the language.

Both of the men were regarding him intently, as if anxious to determine the effect of the speech on him.

Vance acknowledged the introduction with a nod. He realized that he would learn more by keeping his mouth shut and letting them do the talking.

The smaller man, Numari, glanced about the small clearing and then his eyes shifted to the vast dark depths of the forest. There was a worried, apprehensive frown on his face when his pale eyes returned nervously to his companion, the man he had designated as Rakar.

Rakar growled something unintelligible from the depths of his bull-neck and swung to face Vance.

"You haven't said how you came here," he said. There was no friendliness in his gruff, snarling voice.

"You haven't asked me," Vance said. His lean brown face hardened. He didn't like the other's tone and he wasn't bothering to hide his feelings.

Numari raised a chiding hand and shot a swift, warning glance at Rakar before turning a pleasant face to Vance.

"Naturally," he said, smoothly, "your presence here is somewhat intriguing. You must pardon our curiosity, but there are things we are anxious to know. It is true, is it not, that you come from the great dimension of movement; where machines of all type and description move over the land, fly through the air and burrow under the ground and sea?"

"Yes," Vance said, puzzled, "that is true." He wondered fleetingly how the other knew. And he wondered again where and what this place was.

"Ah!" smiled Numari, "that is so very interesting. You see, we know certain things about your world and we are very interested in learning more. We

have, as you doubtless have noticed, learned your language, but there are other important things we would be happy to know. First, we would be greatly obliged if you would tell us how you came here."

HE LEANED forward as he spoke and his thin, edged features were touched with a faint smile. But the smile did not go as far as his eyes. They remained pale and emotionless, shifting slightly away from Vance's direct stare.

"I'm not sure myself," Vance answered. Without exactly knowing why, he was stalling for time, trying to find out what Numari was driving at in his oblique, subtle manner.

"What, then, of Laonara?" Rakar demanded. But he did not address this question to Vance. His hot gaze was on his slender companion, Numari, and there was a controlled and bitter anger in his harsh voice.

Numari glanced warningly at him. Vance caught the swift expression of displeasure that accompanied the look.

"Rakar," Numari said to Vance, "speaks of Laonara, a young girl, who has been known to frequent this spot on occasions. Perhaps you have seen her?"

Vance kept his face expressionless. He could tell from the tense looks on the faces of the two mounted men that there was more than a casual significance behind Numari's question. He felt as if he were finally seeing part of the design that lay behind Numari's interrogation.

"A girl?" he repeated. He frowned and shook his head puzzledly.

"Yes?" Numari said. "You have seen her?" Excitement had crept into his soft voice.

Vance realized, now, that it was to his own advantage to say nothing of the girl. Although he couldn't imagine how,

that information might be a trump card later.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You're the only persons I've seen here." That much was strictly true. "What does this girl look like?"

"She is tall and fair," Numari answered. "You would remember her if you saw her."

"We are wasting time," Rakar growled. He swung the head of his mount impatiently about. "We must be going." He added something in a tongue unintelligible to Vance. The last sentence was spoken directly to Numari and seemed to be a sharp command.

Numari nodded slightly and turned to Vance.

"Since you have arrived so unexpectedly in our midst, we would be very happy to offer you such accommodations as we have at our disposal."

VANCE realized that he was helpless to do anything but accept their offer. As yet, he knew nothing of this place to which he had so mysteriously come. And of the golden girl of the picture, he was equally in doubt. If it hadn't been for Numari's questions about such a girl, he would have been ready to believe that the entire experience had been the result of his imagination.

"All right," he said. He wondered, then, what he was heading for. And he wondered what their reaction would have been had he refused to accompany them.

"Excellent," Numari said. He reined his shaggy, cumbersome beast closer to Vance and extended his hand. Vance clasped his wrist and swung himself up to the back of the animal. He was surprised by the steel-like strength in Numari's arm.

When he was settled, Numari dug heels into the flanks of the great beast

and it lumbered ahead, following Rakar's mount.

The hoofs of the swaying animals struck a ringing, clattering sound from the rock-hard ground as they cantered toward the gulley from which the two riders had originally appeared.

They rode through the narrow gash in the ridge and entered a plateau of barren, rocky desolation. The black, depressing landscape spread endlessly away on both sides, an uninviting scene of grim, brooding lifelessness. Ahead, a half-mile or so, Vance judged, another sloping ridge rose into the air, outlined sharply against the boiling red of the sky. When their mounts had plodded across the barren plateau and reached this second ridge, Rakar clattered on ahead and disappeared through a passage in the slope. Numari reined to a stop.

"The delay will not be long," he said.

They waited for several minutes before Rakar appeared again, followed by a half-dozen men similarly mounted. These men were more of Rakar's type than Numari's. Strong and solid, with heavy dark beards, they sat their steeds with careless ease as they galloped forward. They wore plain dark clothing with white sashes, and Rakar's brilliant green and red raiment stood out dramatically against their drab background.

"A few of my good men," Numari murmured. "We will proceed now."

THE new arrivals studied Vance with bold, impassive glances before wheeling their mounts and riding on ahead of the party. Rakar rode directly before Numari. They followed the ridge for a number of miles. It was impossible to estimate how long they had been riding for the great blazing green suns seemed to be fixed and unmoving. Vance studied them carefully

from time to time, but their position was the same as when he had first seen them.

Finally they reached the end of the long sloping ridge which had flanked their course. The party turned and began a slow cautious descent of a descending slope that led downward to an immense spreading valley, in which Vance could see the shapes of vast, alabaster-white buildings stretching for miles in every direction.

Numari reined their mount to a stop at the top of the slope and swept his arm in a wide circle over the vast panoramic scene.

"Welcome to Bondira," he said sardonically. An amused grin touched his lips. "Here, I rule."

Vance studied the majestically sprawling city with interest. The structures were built at a uniform height, but there were no geometric considerations in the lay-out of streets and grouping of edifices. They were jumbled about like carelessly arranged blocks, without reference to size or position. In the light of the green suns the white buildings gleamed with a pale weird translucence that cast a gleaming corona about each structure.

"It is pretty, is it not?" Numari murmured. Rakar and the others of the party were half-way down the slope, Vance noticed. Numari swung their mount about.

"Let us go down," he said.

CHAPTER III

Bondira

WHEN they reached the main section of the sprawling city, Numari dismounted and tossed the reins of his mount to a young boy who was standing outside one of the larger, gleaming white buildings.

Vance had seen few inhabitants in the streets of the strange city. On several occasions he had seen men moving slowly along the wide streets, but there was something beaten and furtive about their appearance that puzzled him.

Numari led him through the arched, open doors of the building into a wide, softly-lighted foyer. Here, Vance saw more men, swarthy, bearded giants, of the type that had accompanied them to the city. These men were standing at various stations apparently on guard duty. Two of them stepped forward and swung open a huge door as Numari and Vance strode across the floor of the foyer.

Numari nodded briefly to the men, and they bowed their heads and placed their right hands over their hearts as he passed.

The door closed silently behind them as they entered a large, luxuriously furnished hall, lighted by softly glowing tapers in each of the room's four corners.

Couches lined the laminated walls, covered with soft, lustrous skins and over the gleaming, translucent floor were scattered thick-woven rugs of gray and white patterns.

The arched ceiling was covered with an intricate tracery of design that seemed to form changing shapes as the flickering luminations played over them.

In the center of the room, facing the massive doors through which they had entered, was an elevated dais, gleaming with gilded metal. The seat and back of the throne were covered with tinted furs. A number of lower chairs were grouped about this central dais.

Numari seated himself on the dais and carefully arranged his green and red robes over his knees. There was a cryptic smile hovering about his lips

as he waved Vance to one of the chairs grouped about the dais.

"Please, be seated," he smiled. "You must be tired after your trip."

Vance sensed that the words were not merely polite; they expressed a deliberate command. There was, he noticed, a definite change in Numari's attitude since they had reached the city. The anxiousness and worry had dropped from him and his smile was tinged with a sardonic irony as he studied Vance.

Vance remained standing.

"I'm more comfortable this way," he said drily.

NUMARI settled back on his ornate dais. His fingers toyed with tassels on the arms of the chair.

"As you prefer," he said. "There are several things I want to discuss with you, but I will wait until you are rested and refreshed. Primarily I am curious to know more of the workings of your vast mechanistic civilization. I find such things very fascinating. I'm sure you won't mind acting as my tutor for a while."

"I'm not so sure," Vance said. He realized suddenly that he was in an extremely peculiar position. Whether it was a precarious position, he couldn't tell. That would depend on Numari and his designs. But he did realize that he knew nothing about where he was or how he had come to this amazing land; and that without Numari's approval there would be little chance of his ever leaving.

Numari leaned forward. His thin face was quite expressionless, but his cold eyes were narrowed suspiciously.

"Just what do you mean," he said.

"I have to return to my own country as soon as possible," Vance said quietly. "I am needed there. I can't stay here."

Numari studied him thoughtfully for a moment and then he smiled slowly. Leaning back in his throne he chuckled softly.

"I understand," he said. "Naturally you are anxious to return to your own—er—land. And we are more than anxious to do what will please you. But there may be some slight delays in arranging your transportation." His lips widened in a smile. "Yes, transportation might be something of a problem."

"What do you mean?" Vance asked. "Why should there be any difficulty?"

"I will explain everything to you tomorrow," Numari said, smiling easily. "Now you need food and rest. I am sure you will find things quite comfortable here while you are with us."

He raised a slender hand in the air. The gesture was obviously a signal, for a small door at the opposite end of the room opened and an elderly, white-haired man entered.

"Yes?" he said respectfully.

WITHOUT turning his eyes from Vance, Numari said, "Take this man to a room here in my palace. Bring him food and see that he is comfortable. Do you understand, Aki?"

"Yes," the elderly man said quietly.

"Aki," Numari said to Vance, "is one of the few slaves in my kingdom who understands the language you speak. How he picked it up is a mystery, even to me. That is why I have arranged for him to act as your personal servant while you are with us. I am sure that he will be able to satisfy all of your needs."

"You seem to be arranging a rather permanent set-up," Vance said thoughtfully. "You really do expect me to spend quite a while here, don't you?"

Numari looked pained.

"It grieves me to think that the

thought of staying a while with me is repugnant to you. I had hopes that you might grow to like it here and remain with us, of your own volition, for a pleasant stay. But," he sighed, "that is obviously not to be. We will discuss everything on the morrow, however. In the meantime everything here is at your disposal. Enjoy yourself."

It was an obvious dismissal.

Vance hesitated an instant and then he glanced at the servant, Aki, who was holding the door open for him. He shrugged and sauntered toward the open door. Numari did not turn his head, but Vance could see the amused smile on his face and the winking lights of mirth in his eyes.

Vance felt, as he walked through the open door and into a dimly lit corridor, that he was walking straight into trouble. But there was no other course for him to take. Everything he had encountered in this strange land had been bewilderingly confusing, and until he learned something of the place, it would be sheer folly to take a step on his own.

What was Numari's purpose in keeping him here? There was no answer to that question. There were no answers to any of the tormenting questions that his very presence here raised.

In a lifetime of adventurous living Vance had looked many times into the dark face of the unknown, but always there had been something palpable to fight, to hit, to shoot, to put his hands on. Now there was nothing but bewildering mystery, further complicated by Numari's sly innuendos and by the meaningful glances exchanged between the burly Rakar and Numari, when they had questioned him about the golden girl.

WHAT had they called her?
Laonara!

What was Numari's interest in this girl? Was this Laonara, they mentioned, the same glorious, viking-proud golden girl of the picture?

Vance shook his head despairingly. He was beginning to doubt even the evidence of his own senses. His entire memory of the girl in the picture might have been no more than a mirage, an hallucination or some queer optical illusion.

The corridor door closed with a slight click. The sound brought him back to reality.

The servant, Aki, stepped in front of him and bowed deferentially.

"Will you follow me please?"

Vance noted the old man's stumbling, halting speech; but he also noted the calm, clear blue eyes, and the proud, seamed features of the man. In spite of his years his carriage was erect and straight, belying the snow-white hair that crowned his noble head like a halo.

He nodded and the old man turned and moved slowly down the long corridor. Vance followed him past two intersecting corridors and up a long sloping walk that led to a higher level. The walls and floors were composed of a hard shiny substance, as smooth and lustrous as marble, but it was unveined and as white as alabaster.

The old man halted at last before a door that was so perfectly fitted into the wall as to be practically unnoticeable. He opened the door with a gentle shove and stood aside.

Vance stepped into a large, windowless room, comfortably furnished with two couches set against opposite walls and low backless chairs covered with soft tan furs.

There were no windows in the room. Illumination was provided by slim tapers that burned softly and slowly and without causing any noticeable smoke.

Vance realized that in spite of the architectural perfection of the city, and the generally cultured air of the inhabitants he had met, he had seen no evidences of mechanical or electrical developments.

When he looked around he saw that Aki, the aged servant, had followed him into the room, closing the door behind him.

The old man's face was tense with excitement and his steady blue eyes were fixed intently on him, as if trying to measure and weigh him with the glance.

"Please," the old man whispered, in his strange halting accent, "I must talk with you. There is no time to lose."

VANCE stared at him in surprise.

There was something demanding and urgent in the old man's voice that compelled his interest.

"Okay," he said.

Aki's brown forehead wrinkled in confusion.

"Okay?" he repeated doubtfully. "I do not know—"

Vance smiled.

"That means all right, go ahead. I'm listening."

Aki looked quickly behind him, at the closed door, then turned back to Vance.

"You must leave this place," he said in a hoarse whisper. "You must not stay here another minute. Already it may be too late."

Vance studied the old man's honest, seamed face, and a slow frown settled over his eyes as he saw the anxious fear that twisted those aged features.

"Perhaps you'd better tell me what you mean," he said.

The old man shot another fearful glance at the door behind him.

"There is no time," he said tensely. His trembling, veined hands clutched

Vance's arms imploringly. "You must believe me. I know why you were brought here. She has told me everything. I have helped her with all the plans. But something has gone wrong. Someone discovered what she was attempting. That is why you are here now, in the castle of Numari, instead of with her. Don't you see? You must believe me."

Vance shook his head, his face grim and serious. Nothing the old man said made any sense to him, but he had the feeling that he was coming closer to the heart of the mystery that surrounded his presence in this strange, incredible world.

"I'm sorry, Aki," he said. "I don't get what you're driving at. Who is this 'she' you're talking about?"

"She?" Aki repeated. His voice and face were incredulous. "But I thought you knew. Before the evil days of Numari and Rakar she was our queen, our goddess, our ruler. She was kind and wise and good and governed us in peace and happiness. And she will once again, I—I swear." The old man drew himself up proudly as he spoke and there was a look of eagles in his steady, blue eyes.

"But who is she?" Vance persisted.

"She is Laonara," Aki said.

THE name rang a bell in Vance's memory. That was the name Numari had mentioned. The name of the girl Numari and Rakar had asked him about so carefully and searchingly.

Laonara then must have been the girl in the portrait, the magnificent, viking-blond girl with the swirling, smoky eyes, whose image had metamorphosed to throbbing life before his eyes a day, a year, an aeon ago.

"You must come with me," Aki insisted. "There is danger for you here. Numari and Rakar seek only your

knowledge of war-like, destructive science. They want that power for their own designs."

"Where else can I go?" Vance asked. "I couldn't leave here if I wanted to. And why was I brought to this place? That was Laonara's idea, wasn't it?"

"Yes," Aki admitted. "But she, herself, must explain why. When you have seen Laonara everything will be clear and right and understandable to you."

"Can you take me to her?"

"Yes," Aki's voice trembled with relief. His eyes were shining brightly and his gnarled, veined hands clasped together in a gesture of gratitude. "Yes," he repeated jubilantly, "I can and will take you to my queen, Laon—"

A heavy knock suddenly sounded on the door of the room, splintering the quiet silence. Aki wheeled about, an expression of terror spreading over his seamed features. Before he could move again the door was shoved roughly inward and Rakar shouldered his way into the room. His dark, bearded face was impassively cynical, but his eyes were black and hot as they swung from Aki to Vance.

He was not alone. Several of the heavy-shouldered riders stood behind him in the corridor, their brutal faces gleaming with anticipation.

RAKAR stared at Vance for a long moment and a humorless smile parted his full, heavy lips.

"This is interesting," he said softly.

"Is it?" Vance said. He fought to curb his rising anger. There was something in Rakar's insolent state that raised the hackles on the back of his neck.

Rakar turned from him without answering. His thick powerful hand shot out and closed over Aki's frail shoulder. The muscles of his forearm bunched,

his fingers closed like steel claws and Aki sank to his knees, a sobbing moan breaking from his lips.

"Dog!" Rakar growled. He shook the old man roughly, savagely. Still holding the old man with his one hand he lifted him from the floor and flung him toward the men standing in the corridor. They caught Aki's stumbling form and jerked him erect, twisting his arms behind his body. His white head sagged limply forward against his chest.

"Take him away," Rakar snapped.

He turned to Vance, his heavy, dark face reddened with his rage.

"You will be wise to forget what you heard from this mad slave," he growled.

Vance glanced briefly at the elderly slave, Aki, held helpless in the grip of Rakar's men and then his gaze swung back to Rakar.

"What are you going to do to him?" he asked, ignoring Rakar's instruction.

Rakar's strong white teeth flashed against the darkness of his beard.

"That does not concern you," he said. "What difference does it make whether a slave lives or dies?"

"It does to me," Vance snapped. He felt Aki's eyes on him, silently imploring. "Numari, your ruler, gave this man to me to use as a personal servant. I think that entitles me to some say in the matter. Tell your men to take their hands off him. If he's to be punished Numari will take care of it, not your gang of hoodlums."

Vance watched the expression on Rakar's face as he spoke. He was stalling for time, hoping to bluff Rakar into releasing the slave. There were questions he had to ask Aki, questions that might solve the whole riddle of his presence here in this strange, barbaric world. And he didn't intend to let that chance slip from him. But it was impossible to judge the effect of his

words on Rakar.

The man's swarthy, lowering face was as enigmatic as the fissures in a granite wall.

"I have given you excellent advice," he said harshly. "Keep out of this affair and forget what you have heard. This old fool will have his head split within the hour and that will be the end of the matter."

VANCE stepped forward slowly, and instinctively his hands tightened into hard fists. He didn't know what he could do to help Aki, but he was through stalling.

Rakar put a big hand against his chest.

"I have warned you," he said tensely.

Vance moved forward against the pressure of Rakar's hand and his gray eyes were dancing with reckless lights. There was a tingling excitement in his veins. He knew, now, what was going to happen.

"Take your hand down," he said quietly.

Rakar's dark face flushed with hot anger. His thick brutal lips flattened against his teeth.

"Fool!" he hissed.

The muscles of his arm and shoulder flexed as he lunged suddenly forward, shoving his entire strength and weight against Vance's chest.

Vance had been expecting the move. He twisted sharply sideways and Rakar's hand slipped from his chest.

The momentum of Rakar's lunge sent him sprawling to the floor. With a roar of bestial rage he clambered to his feet and rushed at Vance, his great fists swinging like flailing mallets.

Vance dropped into a crouch, a savage exultation coursing through his body. He slipped under Rakar's wildly swinging arms and drove a sledgehammer blow into his stomach.

Rakar staggered back, his face whitening with pain. His mouth opened and closed spasmodically as he fought for breath. Vance stepped in and swung again, coldly, savagely. His fist connected solidly with the bigger man's jaw.

Rakar fell backward through the door of the room, sprawling in a tangled heap at the feet of the three guards who were holding the slave, Aki.

He rolled to a kneeling position, his hands clasped over his bleeding lips. There was a maniacal gleam of hatred in his narrowed, gleaming eyes.

Two of his gray-clad men had drawn short, wicked-looking knives and were starting for Vance, but he checked them with a sharp gesture of his hand.

"Wait!" he growled through swollen lips. His hate-maddened eyes swung to Vance. A cruel, humorless smile touched his lips.

"We shall see Numari now," he said softly. "We have played too long with you." He motioned to his men, who were crouched tensely, with daggers drawn. "Take him to the council chamber."

Vance realized that it would be useless to resist. He relaxed as the two of Rakar's men pinioned his arms and dragged him from the room and down the corridor. Rakar followed, with Aki and his guard bringing up the rear.

CHAPTER IV

NUMARI was reclining indolently on his raised dais, and there were a number of the gray-clad, grim-looking guards posted at the entrances of the council chamber, when Vance was dragged into the softly-lighted, luxuriously furnished room.

Numari's thin, cynical face expressed an amused surprise as he stared blandly from Vance to Rakar.

"Has there been some difficulty?" he inquired softly. He made a slight gesture to the men holding Vance, and they released him and stepped back a few paces.

"Yes," Rakar snapped harshly. He motioned to the guard holding Aki to shove him forward. "This traitor has been caught red-handed, spreading lies about you and talking of Laonara, which alone is punishable by death."

Numari glanced fleetingly at Aki and shook his head sadly.

"How very thoughtless of you," he murmured. He turned again to Rakar. "And to whom was he telling these—ah—lies?"

Rakar nodded toward Vance.

"The one from the other world. And his actions indicate that he believes the slave before us. We have made a mistake in treating him gently. There are other methods he might understand more readily."

"Possibly," Numari said. He shifted slowly on his chair until he faced Vance directly.

"Do you have anything to say in answer to these charges?" he asked quietly.

Vance smiled mockingly.

"Would it do me any good?" He folded his arms and met Numari's gaze deliberately. "I don't know what your game is but I don't like what I've seen so far."

"That is a pity," Numari said, smiling. "Since you are going to spend considerable time with us, your attitude is unfortunate. We need your knowledge and information of the mechanical and electrical developments of your dimension. We were prepared to make your stay as pleasant as possible if you were willing to cooperate. "Now," he shrugged eloquently, "you are forcing us to be unpleasant. It is, however, not too late to change your mind and

your attitude. The scientific knowledge you possess is vital to us and one way or another, we will acquire it. The means we employ will be determined by your attitude."

Vance's jaw set stubbornly.

"I don't feel in a very cooperative mood," he said sarcastically.

Numari sighed. "That is unfortunate—for you. You leave me no alternative. Beneath this building are a number of dungeons which are not particularly pleasant. We find them useful in changing stubborn minds. When I see you again I feel quite sure that you will be more responsive."

He nodded to Rakar.

"You may take charge of the prisoners. Perhaps your methods would have been best from the beginning."

RAKAR smiled slowly, a twisted smile of gloating anticipation, as he regarded Vance. A deep, unpleasant laugh rumbled in his bull throat and his hand moved thoughtfully to his battered jaw.

"It is not too late," he said softly. "I'm sure of that. It is never too late to even scores."

He made a sharp gesture with his hand. The men behind Vance stepped forward and grabbed his arms. One of them prodded the point of a dagger into his back. For an instant Vance tensed, ready to lash out at the men holding him, but he realized that any struggle would be worse than futile. His muscles relaxed and he permitted the men to shove him toward the door.

Numari said, "I will see you again."

Vance halted and twisted to face the dais. There were hard bitter lights in his gray eyes.

"Yes," he said softly, "you'll see me again."

Numari's light laugh was in his ears as he was shoved through the door and

it was slammed behind him with thudding finality.

Vance was led along a corridor to an intersecting passageway that sloped downward at a noticeable angle. For several minutes they followed this circular, descending corridor, and with each step the increasing humidity became more stifling. Rivulets of water trickled down the smooth sides of the corridor and collected in puddles on the hard, smooth floor. An occasional flickering taper cast a dubious illumination over the glistening walls.

Vance could hear Rakar behind him and he could also hear the lighter steps of Aki and the man who guarded him, but other than these sounds the tunnels were as silent as a tomb.

It was impossible to gauge distance or time in the subterranean passages. For what seemed to be hours they followed the tortuously winding passage until finally it straightened and levelled out. Now the tapers were hundreds of feet apart, and except for these intervals, they plodded on through the dank tunnels in a stygian blackness.

When they passed the next light Vance noticed a door on one side of the passage. It was apparently cut into the stone in the most primitive fashion. One small window, hardly three inches square, had been chiseled at its top and this was the only aperture in the solid face of the door.

Vance shuddered as they trudged past this crypt-like entrance. His imagination balked at the image of what might lie behind that door, in the gloomy vault it sealed.

He realized then that such a cell was probably his own destination. Drops of perspiration started on his forehead. Imprisonment in one of the tomb-like vaults that lined these dark corridors would be a hell on earth, a living death.

Finally, after their seemingly inter-

minable march, the two men at his side jerked him to a halt. Rakar strode up alongside him.

"This is the end of the tunnel system," he said. He pointed ahead where Vance could see, through the gloom, a solid wall blocking off the corridor. "For men left here," Rakar continued, "this is generally the end of the world. When you again see the light you will be older—and wiser."

ONE of Vance's guard had pulled open a creaking, vault-like door, exposing a small, damp cell, barely large enough for a person to stand in. There was a rustle of small things on the floor as the light from the corridor fell into the room.

"You will not be completely alone," Rakar said ironically.

The two guards, at a sign from Rakar, suddenly jerked Vance's arms behind his back and twisted them so that he was pinioned helplessly between them.

"Before I leave you here to rot," Rakar said savagely, "I'm going to pay you back in full for this."

He touched his battered jaw, the result of Vance's swinging fist, and smiled bitterly.

"This will be something for you to remember in the darkness," he said.

With sadistic deliberation he drew back his fist and drove it at Vance's face with all of his strength.

But the blow did not find its mark. At the instant the swing started, Vance hurled himself to one side, jerking the guards off their feet with the unexpectedness of his lunge.

Rakar bellowed in rage. But before he could move toward Vance a rumbling reverberation suddenly blasted through the dimly-lighted passageway, jarring the solid rock beneath their feet. There was a crushing noise, as

of two mighty boulders grinding together, and then the wall that blocked off the tunnel swung ponderously, slowly open.

A terrible, deep-throated roar blasted against the walls of the tunnel, as the intersecting wall swung clear.

Vance hurled one guard from him and was struggling to his feet, when the dreadful, marrow-chilling sound exploded in his ears, deafening him with its immensity.

He wheeled toward the sound and the incredible sight that met his eyes branded itself on his memory for all time.

A golden, lion-like beast was crouched at the end of the tunnel, its mighty jaws distended horribly, as roar after roar blasted from its great chest, jarring the walls and ceiling with their impact.

And behind this immense beast stood the flowing haired, thrillingly beautiful girl who had first appeared to him as a painted figure in a picture.

Now, her face was aflame with triumphant exultation and smoky lights swirled in the depths of her enormous eyes.

Vance saw her lips move, saw her hand touch the mighty beast, crouched at her feet like a dog. And then what happened was too quick for his eye to follow.

A roar split the air. The great golden beast was a blurred, tawny streak as its powerful legs charged past Vance. Vance wheeled in time to see Rakar go down before the onslaught, a hideous gurgling scream tearing from his throat.

One of the brutal guards who had been holding Vance crawled to his feet and lurched toward the imperious figure of the golden girl, a dagger clutched in his fist.

Vance caught him by the shoulder,

jerked him about and slammed a chopping axe-like blow into his face, sprawling him to the ground.

A SCREAM sounded behind him and he spun about just in time to see Aki, the white-haired slave, fall backward against the wall, hands clasping his reddening breast. The guard who had struck the blow still held the dripping knife in his hand as he turned to face Vance's charge.

Vance feinted with his shoulder, drew the man's arms up and then drove in low, his powerfully driving legs propelling his body like a catapult. His hard, muscle-bunched shoulder caught the guard at the knees, cutting him down with scythe-like cleanness.

The guard fell on top of him, but a quick, powerful roll brought Vance up to his knees. The guard slashed at him with the knife, his face contorted with mad fury. Vance ducked and slipped an arm about the guard's body. With a heave he rose to his feet and slammed the body of the guard against the granite-hard wall of the tunnel.

When the man fell to the floor he lay still, his neck twisted at an odd broken angle.

Vance felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned and met the girl's haunting, smoky gray eyes, on a level with his own. At her side the mighty golden beast crouched quietly, tail lashing nervously. There was something on the floor which had once been a man known as Rakar. Vance shuddered slightly as he looked at the horribly rent, mutilated body, but he knew that the man had deserved the death he'd received.

"We cannot stay here," the girl said. Her voice was smooth and soft and yet there was an undercurrent of regal authority in the liquid tones. "You will come with me, please?"

Vance nodded slowly. He knew,

without knowing why, that this girl was good. The quality was in her eyes and her bearing and her voice.

She took his hand and led him toward the end of the tunnel. When they passed the intersecting wall she pressed a stone set in the wall and the massive gate swung shut behind them, blocking off the tunnel. They were enveloped in an impenetrable blackness.

At his heels he heard the panting of the great beast and the soft pad of its paws on the hard ground. But the girl's hand in his was cool and firm and she led him swiftly and surely through the blackness.

CHAPTER V

Laonara!

VANCE followed the girl for several minutes through the darkness of the twisting corridor. Finally a shaft of bright light fell at his feet as they made a right-angle turn, and in a few steps they were out of the tunnel, under the great arched vault of the red sky with its dual gleaming suns.

They were in a small clearing, formed naturally by erosion in the face of the sheer cliff which towered above them. There was only one other entrance from the tiny valley, and that was a winding trail that led up and over the ledge to the right.

The girl led him to the middle of the clearing and Vance noticed there was a worried, troubled look in her wide eyes.

"Is anything wrong?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. She made a slight gesture with her hand and the great beast sank slowly to the ground, his solemn brown eyes fixed following her slightest motion. "I left some of my men here to wait for me," she said anxiously. "If they thought I had been captured in the city they might have done

something reckless."

She stared about the clearing and her light, delicately arched eyebrows drew together in a faint frown.

Vance found himself staring at her almost incredible perfection of form and feature. She was clad simply in a single, closely fitting garment and her copper-tinted limbs were bare. Sandals laced over her narrow feet and she wore a wide belt about her waist, from which hung a slender, metallic rod with a faintly glowing tip.

She turned suddenly to him and put a hand on his arm. There was worry and tenseness in her mouth and eyes.

"There is much I must tell you," she said, "and there is little time. It was I, Laonara, who brought you here. For many years, since I was a little girl, I ruled here in the city of Bondira, which is the largest city of our kingdom. Then Numari, the usurper, stole the throne and drove me into the forest, where I lived like a hunted thing with those of my subjects who were loyal and who were able to escape and come to me. I did not mind anything but the treatment Numari and his Grand Agent, Rakar, meted out to their subjects. That was the only reason I fought back; I couldn't stand the thought of my people, who had always known peace and freedom, living and dying like slaves under the heel of Numari and his favored clique."

Vance started to speak but Laonara held up one hand.

"PLEASE let me finish. I think I know the questions you would ask. Your world is twice removed from ours, for it is in the third dimension. We are now in the fifth dimension. Long ago our scientists learned the secret of dimensional investigation and for years your civilization has been studied by the learned men of our kingdom. Our

only thought was to attempt to improve our own development through the study of your science and culture. There was no method to pass from one dimension to another, but eventually even this secret was discovered. Our council decided that no one should make the attempt to bridge physically, the dimensional worlds, for we realized that our cultures and blood types would never successfully merge.

"Nevertheless, inter-dimensional travel was possible and Numari realized that, with the science of the third dimensions at his call, he could dominate and subjugate, not only this kingdom, but others as well, possibly even the kingdoms of your dimension. I can't even imagine the scope of his madness. Numari did transport weapons and implements from your dimension, but he was unable to operate or duplicate them. This disobedience of his was the immediate cause of our falling out, which eventually resulted in his usurpation of the throne. But before I fled from the city I destroyed all of the laboratory apparatus and took with me the only remaining device for bridging the dimensional worlds."

Vance's eyes dropped to the slim rod hanging at her belt. Laonara touched it with her fingers.

"This is it. With it, I brought you here. I had no right to. I was violating our oldest law, but I was desperate. I had to have someone to help me, and this was the only way I knew to get help. Then, after I had succeeded in bringing you here, I almost lost you forever. I was waiting for you by the purple forest, but Numari and Rakar surprised me on one of their scouting trips. That is why, when you arrived, you met them instead of me. I was forced to flee with Shar for my life."

"Shar?" Vance asked.

Laonara pointed to the great beast

at her side.

"This is Shar." She dropped her hand affectionately on one of the short thick horns which curled upward from his majestic head. "He is quite devoted to me. He has saved my life on a number of occasions. You are perfectly safe with him as long as I am here."

The great beast rose to its feet as his mistress was speaking and began to pad about the clearing with a loping, restless gait. His head was raised slightly in a listening attitude. Something seemed to be bothering him, for a nervous whine was rumbling deep in his cavernous chest.

Laonara looked at him anxiously.

"Shar," she whispered. "What is it?"

She looked up the sheer face of the cliff and her eyes were worried. She listened for a long moment, and then Vance saw the expression on her face suddenly change to one of alarm.

"Do you hear anything?" she asked tensely.

Vance listened and then shook his head.

"Not a thing," he said.

SHAR, the great lion-like animal, was circling the clearing at a fast lope. The mighty thews under his silken hide flashed and rippled with each stride. When he finally halted, he reared on his hind legs and scratched furiously against the face of the cliff. A tremendous, baffled roar rumbled in his throat.

Laonara gripped Vance's arm tensely.

"Shar hears," she cried. "My men have attacked the soldiers of Numari. They thought I had been trapped and they're throwing their lives away in a direct onslaught against the city."

"How many men do you have?" Vance asked quickly.

"Not more than two hundred."

"And Numari?"

"He has several thousand mercen-

aries, but the people of the town will not be with him. If something happened to change the tide of the battle, they would turn on him immediately."

"Your men are very brave," Vance said simply. "They're fighting against long odds."

"And I stand here talking!" Laonara cried impatiently. "Shar! Here!"

As the mighty beast wheeled and trotted toward her, the girl turned to Vance and clasped his hand impulsively.

"The city is on the other side of the cliff, a long ride. I may not get there in time to fight with my men, but at least I can die with them. That is all that is left."

She stripped the slim, metallic rod from her waist and closed his hand over it.

"This will take you back to your own world. Go quickly!"

She swung lightly to the back of Shar. "Goodbye!"

Her soft voice broke on the word.

The great animal lifted its head and charged across the clearing. His driving momentum carried him up the sloping path that led from the valley.

At the top of the ridge Laonara turned and waved to Vance. Her glorious hair was thrown back from her forehead and every line of her magnificent body was silhouetted against the blazing red sky as she lifted one hand in a farewell. Then, as Shar plunged forward, she was gone from sight in an instant.

Vance shouted to her, but the cliffs threw back his voice, futilely, mockingly. For an instant Vance stared helplessly at the ridge over which the girl and her mount had disappeared. Then his jaw hardened with determination. He didn't intend to be counted out of this fight quite so easily. Ever since he had reached this incredible land he had been knocked from pillar

to post without a chance to slug back. And Vance, Cameron was accustomed to slugging back.

A plan was already forming in his mind. It was wild and dangerous but there was nothing else for him to do.

Time was the imponderable element. If third dimension time and fifth dimension time were relative. . . .

Feverishly, he studied the slender rod which Laonara had left with him. One end glowed whitely with a pale steady luminence. The other end was equipped with a sliding button that gave under the experimental pressure of his thumb.

For only an instant did he hesitate. Then he held the rod away from him and pressed the button down sharply.

A FAINT sputtering sounded at the glowing end of the tube and the white iridescence changed slowly but steadily to a bright flaming crimson. The glowing red light grew until it seemed that its flashing emanations flooded the entire valley. There was no sensation of heat, only the almost intolerable brilliance of the flaming light, growing brighter by the second.

Vance forced himself to stare directly at the core of the brilliant ball of light. Only for an instant did the light sear his eyes, then the sensation faded to a peculiarly restful feeling as if he were being mesmerized into a semi-comatose condition by the circle of light at the tip of the slender rod.

Gradually he felt the outlines of the clearing fade away and he seemed to be standing on the edge of a vast unfathomable nothingness. The color of the light was fading from crimson to black and the blackness at the core of the light stretched away like a corridor to infinity.

There was a powerful, undefinable attraction in that black passage-way

and he stepped forward blindly, dazedly.

Then he was falling forward and the blackness enveloped him in a befogging, impenetrable cloud.

Consciousness left him.

CHAPTER VI

VANCE opened his eyes in the familiar surroundings of his apartment. For an instant he stared stupidly, uncomprehendingly about, but as memory returned to him he stood up, his heart beating wildly.

He glanced at his watch but then he realized that relative time values of the two dimensions might be poles apart.

Crossing to the telephone, he dialed the municipal airport and talked to the superintendent, a man who knew of his R.A.F. record.

When he completed the call, he dropped the receiver back to its cradle and strode toward the door. He was still carrying the slender, glowing rod Laonara had given him and he slipped it into his pocket as he left the apartment. . . .

At ten thousand feet Vance levelled out the trim, deadly Thunderbolt fighter he was flying. The ship was responsive to his lightest touch. He set the controls at dead center and locked them there. He made a rapid inspection of the instruments and the two forward cockpit guns, then removed the thin, metallic rod from his pocket.

He held it before him for an instant, hesitating. This was the biggest gamble he had ever made, and if luck wasn't with him it would be his last.

Then he thought of courageous men fighting against oppression, led by a gallant, glorious girl, who was willing and glad to sacrifice her life with those of her loyal followers.

And he hesitated no longer.

His finger jammed down the button on the end of the rod and he watched anxiously as the familiar crimson light appeared, expanding by the second, flooding the cockpit and the sky with its red brilliance.

When the blackness began to appear at the core of the blazing crimson light he knew a moment of fear, but he held the rod directly in front of him and his eyes met the light in a steady, fixed stare.

Once again he felt himself losing touch with reality. The throbbing roar of the plane faded away to a muted hum. He saw nothing but the illimitable blackness of infinity stretching ahead of him and that blackness pulled him forward powerfully. . . .

The drumming roar of the motor in his ears, the slip-stream of air past his face, these things awoke him from his coma-like sleep.

He raised his sagging head from his breast and rubbed a hand over his tired, aching eyes.

Then he looked up and saw two great green suns burning against a fiery red sky.

Consciousness returned with a snap.

A fierce exultation coursed through his veins like a powerful elixir as he realized that he had made it, that the dimensional bridge formed by the glowing rod had brought the plane safely across.

HE WAS still flying at ten thousand feet. Unlocking the controls he swung the plane down in a sharp dive. For several minutes his gaze roved over the broad, barren terrain, then, in the distance and to his right, he saw the gleaming white buildings of the sprawling city of Bondira.

His pulses quickened as he levelled out and gunned the ship toward those

alabaster landmarks.

What if he were too late? Maybe the fight had been over for years, or maybe it would occur in some future time.

He gritted his teeth savagely. No! He *must* be in time.

When he flashed over the city and peered down he saw a sight that raised his hopes.

There were men fighting in the streets and he spotted the majority of them as the gray-clad mercenaries of Numari.

He banked the plane and dropped down. The focal point of the battle seemed to be in front of Numari's council building. On the steps and approaches of the building was a handful of men, fighting desperately against the steadily advancing grayclad ranks.

As he flashed over their heads he had a fleeting, thrilling image of Laonara, astride the mighty beast, Shar, fighting magnificently in the fore of the ragged, hopelessly outnumbered group on the steps of the building.

Vance swung around and dove toward the thickly massed troops of Numari, a grim smile twisting his lips.

His hands pressed the firing button. A chattering chant of death broke from the muzzles of the guns. He flicked the tail of the ship, spreading the devastating blast of his guns in hundred-foot swaths, cutting through Numari's troops like an invisible scythe.

He swung the plane about in a tight bank and roared back over the heads of the gray-clad mercenaries. Holding his fire, he watched them scatter, as they broke their formations and fled madly. And he saw Laonara's troops closing their ranks and starting after the disorganized mercenaries.

For several minutes he followed the fleeing, routed troops of Numari, cutting them down like an avenging neme-

sis, until he saw them flinging away their weapons and dropping to the ground in surrender.

Banking again, he circled over the gleaming white council building of Numari, which now, he knew, would again be Laonara's.

He settled down to a few hundred feet and circled until he saw the soldiers of Laonara returning.

Laonara, herself, was leading the small band, head flung back, hair streaming in the wind.

Vance felt a sharp, strange pang as he looked on her splendid, glorious beauty, for he knew that he was seeing her for probably the last time.

She had stopped now and, with Shar at her side, was looking up at his plane.

Vance lifted his hand in salute to her and to her courageous followers, for he knew he was not going to land. There was room for a landing, but he was afraid that he might never take-off again if he stood once more at Laonara's side.

And he had to keep on flying. His job wasn't done yet. Laonara's fight for freedom had been won, but he still had a battle on his hands.

She answered his wave. There was a pleading uncertainty in the gesture, but Vance knew she'd understand, eventually, why he was leaving.

With a roaring climb he hurled the Thunderbolt up into the red heavens and his finger pressed the button on the slim, metallic rod.

He smiled faintly as the glowing crimson flame suffused the cock-pit, for he realized that he would always have the means of returning to this land and to its glorious queen.

But not until his own fight had been won. His smile turned to a grin as the blackness swept toward him. He had a hunch that it wasn't going to be such a long wait.

IT'S A CHANGING WORLD!

Sometimes we think it hardly pays to go to school!

By the time we finish, science has reversed its field

THE USEFUL BAMBOO

ERRONEOUS indeed is the popular belief that the bamboo tree is only used for furniture and knick-knacks, we find that the tree has probably more uses than any other tree known. In fact, it is an absolute necessity to many of the tropical natives who use it in practically every article they make.

The bambo tree furnishes the natives of India with food, household utensils, and wood that is lighter yet stronger than other timber of the same size. People living in the South Sea Islands use the bamboo trees for the construction of their homes, for bamboo is not only cooler than other building materials, but also safer during earthquakes because of its lightness.

Without the bamboo tree, the poorer natives of the Philippines would face extinction. His entire home is made of bamboo—from the posts on which it rests to the floor and walls and ladder used as a stairway. Not one iron nail is used in the construction, but bamboo pegs and bamboo ropes hold the structure together.

The Filipino women cook their rice dinners in the hollow joints of a green bamboo over a fire of bamboo twigs. Bamboo utensils are used to carry water from a nearby stream.

The Filipino fashions his flutes and violins from bamboo trees as well as his farming tools, fishing tools, and implements of war.

And, as in life, so in death, the bamboo serves the Filipino by furnishing the mat and poles to carry him to his grave, dug with a bamboo scoop, which will be marked with a bamboo cross.

COLUMBUS' BACKER

CONTRARY to our school-day belief, Isabella of Spain was not the sole backer of Columbus' voyage to America. In fact, Isabella was not even the principal backer. Two brothers, Martin and Vincente Pinzon, who were in command of the Pinto and Nina respectively during the voyage, not only supplied these two vessels but also contributed the greater portion of the funds needed to buy food and navigation instruments. The entire cost of the expedition was approximately 36,000 pesetas which would be about \$7,000 in American money today.

BABY BOYS

DR. WILLIAM O. PUCKETT of Princeton University has conducted experiments with bullfrogs that, if they could work in humans, would cause Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo to sit up and take notice. For Dr. Puckett has successfully determined whether a tadpole of the bullfrog race should be a male or a female by injecting certain hormones. The reproductive

glands of a very young tadpole are neither male nor female, but can develop into either type. After the first year of life, the tadpoles develop either male or female organs in about a fifty-fifty ratio.

The reproductive glands can be made to mature more quickly by injecting pituitary gland extract, but this injection will not determine the sex. However, if theelin, the female hormone, or testosterone, the male hormone is injected with the pituitary extract the tadpoles will become females or males, respectively. Thus, Dr. Puckett could produce males and females in any ratio he desired among the tadpoles.

Imagine the arguments that would arise in a family expecting a new arrival when the parents tried to decide whether they should have a boy or girl. And, of course, the dictators would welcome this chance to reinforce their armies of the future. Fortunately for us, Dr. Puckett has only been able to perform his experiments successfully on tadpoles. Someday, when the world again becomes civilized, such knowledge will be a great benefit.

FIZZ WATER

ALTHOUGH Americans always order a soda or ask for a glass of soda-water at the corner drugstore, the drink contains no soda whatsoever.

The two chief ingredients of soda-water—or carbonated water as it is properly called—are marble dust and sulphuric acid. Strange as it may seem, each ingredient when taken alone would be injurious to the human body, yet when properly mixed they form a drink enjoyed by all of us.

These two ingredients must be mixed under a pressure of 150 pounds per square inch, a pressure which requires many protective devices and strong machines. The generator used is made of gun metal iron and can withstand a 500 pound pressure.

The marble dust and sulphuric acid are brought together and cradled in this generator. The resulting gas is passed into steel fountains which resemble a huge aerial bomb lined with black tin and filled two-thirds full of water that is to be charged. These containers are then delivered to soda fountains.

The "dust" from the marble is produced from the chips remaining after the huge marble slabs are worked on to produce buildings, building fronts, tombstones, and monuments. It is known in this country as "snowflake."

Although we have improved the machinery used in production, the original method of producing soda-water invented by an engineer named Bramah is still used today.

SON of a WITCH

by ROBERT BLOCH



Black Art floated out the window on the carpet

Lefty Feep was just bidding to run up the opposition at the auction, but he went too far and bought a bale of woe.

WHEN Lefty Feep approached my table at Jack's Shack, I rose to my feet with a gasp of indignation.

"Here, let me brush you off," I said. "The nerve of those careless waiters—spilling a tray full of chop suey on your suit."

Feep's eyebrows rose and circled above his thin, morose face. His hand motioned me back into my seat.

"Nobody spills chop suey on me," he corrected. "This is not Chinese hash on my coat—it is the weave of my suit." I took another look. What I saw on Feep's suit was more of a writhe than a weave. The threads cascaded snakily through a baggy tweed in a riot of clashing colors.

As Feep sat down I shook my head.

"I don't understand you, Lefty," I murmured. "These loud clothes you sport—your taste in color! Don't you ever wear anything quiet?"

"Sure," snapped Feep. "Earmuffs."

"I mean, why these awful patterns and color combinations? Have you no love of beauty?"

"Certainly. Me, I like blondes."

"No," I amended, hastily. "I speak of aesthetics."

"Aesthetics? I have aesthetics last

year when they yank my tonsils out."

"That's anaesthetics," I told him. "But don't you like soft, pastel shadings in paintings and tapestries? Don't you like the quiet richness, say, of a fine oriental rug?"

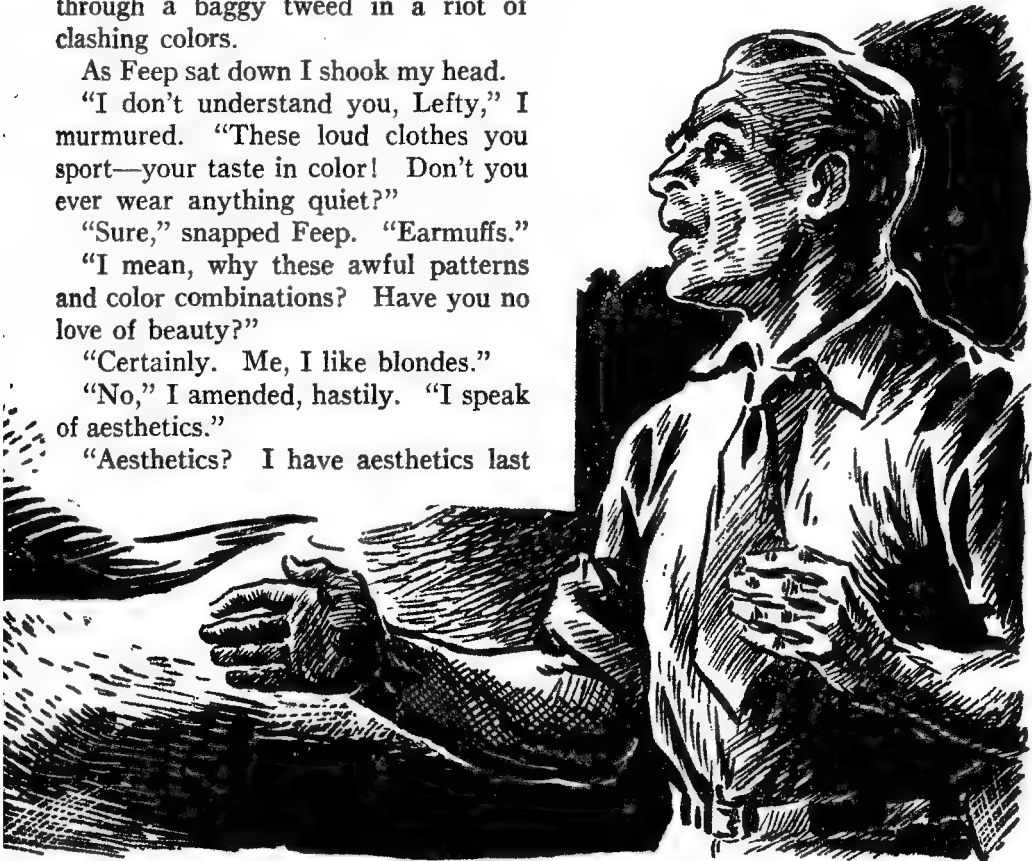
"Rugs!" snarled Lefty Feep.

"But you haven't—"

"Rugs!" howled Feep. "Bugs to rugs!"

"What's the matter, man? I only asked you if you liked rugs."

Feep's eyebrows bristled like twin toothbrushes. He leaned even closer and spoke from between tight lips. "Rugs are for mugs, thugs, and slugs,"



he grated. "On my floor at home you find only tile, linoleum, or empty gin bottles. Rugs, never!"

"Why? What have you got against rugs?"

"You ask me that? Can it be that I do not tell you about the time I go to Out-Of-Business Oscar's auction?"

"Can be," I answered. "I never knew you attended an auction in your life."

"It is very nearly the last thing I do attend," murmured Lefty Feep, closing his eyes. "When I think what could happen to me because of it, the cold chills still use my spine for a race-track."

Something about Feep's voice made me want to hear the story. Or perhaps it was just the fact that he now grabbed me by the lapels and held me so I couldn't escape.

"I will tell you about the experience I have with a rug," he muttered. "Then we will take you out to be defrosted."

"Why?"

"Because," whispered Lefty Feep, "it will turn your blood to ice."

I sat there, refrigerating slowly, as Feep began to unwind his tongue . . .

* * *

I AM always a very active personality, as you know. I am hep to pep. Making lazy drives me crazy. Well, I get up bright and early one afternoon, all ready for a big day. I am just pulling the cork out of my breakfast when I realize there is nothing to do.

This is a terrible feeling for an ambitious guy like me, but it is true. Today there is nothing for me to do at all. No races are running. No football pools are going. All the pinball machines are shut down. There isn't even a crap game going on over at Gorilla Gabface's pool hall. In other words, I am unemployed.

Naturally, any sensible citizen will

realize the only way out is to crawl right back into bed until at least the burlesque shows open. But I am all energy today, so I decide to go out and stroll around.

I am toddling down the old stem about an hour later when I find myself passing Out-Of-Business Oscar's.

This Out-Of-Business Oscar is a personality who runs a second hand joint down the street. He derives his nickname from the big signs he plasters up all over the front of his rubbish palace.

GOING OUT OF BUSINESS says the big banner across the front.

MUST VACATE IN THIRTY DAYS. FORCED SALE — LEASE EXPIRES!

It is hard to read the words on these signs. They are pretty faded, because the signs must be about twenty years old by now.

But Oscar has some new ones up today.

PRICES CUT says the first one.

PRICES SLASHED says the second one.

PRICES BLEEDING TO DEATH says the third.

Then there is one just under these that reads FIRE SALE. But I do not pay any attention to that. Out-Of-Business Oscar is the kind of guy who starts a fire sale every time he lights a cigar.

Which is pretty often, because Oscar finds a lot of cigars in front of the curb.

The sign that does interest me is hanging over the door. AUCTION TODAY!

SURE enough. I peek in and see a lot of specimens around a big counter; and Oscar is standing up on top looking like a judge with a gavel in his hand.

So I figure I got time to kill and maybe I can murder it by taking a look

at this auction. I walk inside and listen while Oscar begins to deal out the spiel.

"Gentlemen," he yaps, just as though there are some in the crowd. "As you know, today we auction off the estate of the late Mrs. Bobo Grope. We are privileged to dispose of the household effects of this millionaire-ess—her valuable collection of old masters, her antiques and art treasures, and her price-less oriental curiosities."

Then he starts the sale. Well, to make a long story tedious, he is not doing so hot. The stuff he auctions off is very high class, but the customers aren't. They bid only a half buck or a dollar on all the lovely pictures and pottery. This is a shame—I am not a corner sewer of art, but from the way he describes it, I see that this is all the real McCoy, if oriental furnishings are ever made by any McCoy.

Poor Oscar warms up and sweats. He hauls out the bric and the brac and gives with the tongue. He grabs a couple pots and waves his arms.

"I have here two gorgeous specimens of the Sung Dynasty," he hollers. "Two exquisite Chinese cuspidors."

They go for a mere six bits.

"And here is a rare Ming mustache cup," he says—and knocks it down to an old goat for a dime.

So it goes. He sells an Egyptian mummy case to a musician who wants it to carry his bass viol in. He disposes of Hindu idols and Siamese carvings for a buck or two. It is breaking his heart.

On top of it, some smart alecks in the crowd keep making gay remarks, and it is very embarrassing to poor Oscar.

He hauls out a big rack and says, "We will now proceed to dispose of this remarkable collection of Persian and Oriental rugs."

A jerk in the rear hollers out to him.

"Get rid of that junk and start auctioning off the harem!"

This is too much for Oscar. He announces that there will be a five-minute pause in the sale, and slides back of the counters.

I know he is going for a drink, so I quick scoot along after him and nab him in the act.

"Why it's Lefty Feep," he says, recognizing my lips on the bottle. "You are a sight for sore eyes. And my eyes are plenty sore today from looking at that crummy mob."

"Too bad," I sympathize.

"WELL, it is my fault," he shrugs.

"This collection of Mrs. Bobo Grope's is famous all over the world. A dozen big experts and orientalists wire and phone that they will show up today. I expect they will pay thousands for some of these rare and curious pieces. So I send out regular engraved announcements, very high class.

"Only I make a mistake. I print that the sale begins at three in the afternoon. And when I file notice legally, I set the time for two. According to law I must start the auction at two, and so here I am, an hour early. None of the big shots arrive yet, and this stuff goes for next to nothing."

I pat him on the back with one hand and reach for the bottle with the other. Then Oscar looks at me.

"Feep, I must get price up. Maybe you will shill for me?"

"You mean, bid against some of those customers and make them bid higher?"

"I appreciate it if you do it," Oscar tells me. "Have another drink and let's get to work."

So we go back to the auction room and that is what I do. Whenever Oscar holds up a rug and somebody offers two dollars, I offer three. And so forth.

Prices rise. We auction off a dozen Arab blankets in a row.

Then Oscar gets to the bottom of the pile. He hauls out a dusty old roll, all tied together with wires at the ends. And he makes a little speech.

He says,

"Friends—I have here a very unusual item, just brought in from abroad."

"What broad?" hollers the heckler in back. But Oscar gives him a nasty look and he shuts up.

"This is one of the rugs Mrs. Bobo Grope buys on her last trip east. It does not arrive until after her death, so I can not tell you its history. It has not been unwrapped but will be sold sight unseen in its original condition. I can assure you it is a very fine piece, because of the elaborate way in which it has been wrapped and crated. Yet I am willing to let it go to the highest bidder to expedite this sale."

Oscar holds up the roll of carpet, tied together at the ends by wire, and waves it around.

"What am I offered?"

"Two bits," yells a guy at my right.

Oscar glares.

"Two bits? I am insulted. Who knows what this precious bundle contains? Remember—Cleopatra herself comes rolled up in a rug when she visits Anthony. Perhaps she is hiding inside."

"In that case, fifty cents," says the heckler. "Though I prefer Gene Tierney."

"Fifty cents!" snorts Oscar. "Why this rug maybe is worth thousands for all we know. Mrs. Bobo Grope pays plenty of money for her rugs. She has plenty of filthy lucre."

"I don't care if she is a filthy looker. I don't care how she looks. I bid fifty cents!" snaps the heckler.

SO I see I must do some shilling here. I bid a dollar. The heckler bids

two. I come right back with three. He bids five. I have him going, so I bid seven. He bids eight. I shrug and bid ten.

"Ten dollars!" yells Oscar. "Do I hear more?"

I wait for the heckler. He is going to raise now. But—he doesn't!

All at once Oscar bangs his gavel.

"Sold for ten dollars," he shouts.

I just stand there with my mouth open. I never expect such a situation, at all. All at once I find out I just buy a lousy piece of carpet for ten dollars. It is awful.

But there is nothing else to do but go up to Oscar and take the rug. I give him ten dollars. Then I put my shoe back on.

"Double-crosser!" I whisper under my breath.

"Sorry," Oscar tells me. "But who knows? Maybe you really got something there."

"Sure. I get a backache carrying home this hunk of burlap," I answer. And I pick up the heavy rug and march out, burning up.

I am still smouldering when I hit the sidewalk. So much so that I do not notice a guy coming in and he runs smack into me at the doorway. I stumble and almost drop my rug.

He turns around.

"Please pardon," he says.

I am all set to give him a few hot remarks when I take another look. I see he just climbs out of a big limousine, about half a block long. So I modify my remarks before I open my mouth. I look again and realize he is a pretty old pickle. Quite a pappy guy, with a long white beard hanging down to his waist. So I modify my remarks still further and finally come out with,

"Don't give me the bump, chump."

He gives me the old eye and I suddenly get a shivering spell. Because

he has a pair of very dark peepers with a glare in them like the neon lights on a funeral home. Those eyes are now boring a hole right through what I am carrying.

"You attend the auction inside?" he asks, very fast.

I admit it.

"Is it very far along?" he questions, excited.

I tell him yes, nearly everything is sold by now.

Pappy jumps up and down on the sidewalk when he hears this. He almost falls on his face or vice-versa, only his beard is tangled up in my coat and it holds him up.

"Tell me I'm not too late," he gasps. I realize he must be one of the big collectors Oscar tells me about, who get the wrong announcements.

"What about the rugs?" he yells to me.

"I am afraid the rugs are going now," I answer. "In fact I purchase a couple yards of oriental cheese-cloth myself."

PAPPY'S face turns a rich purple, which looks very nice with his white beard. He hops up and down, almost pulling off my coat.

"Ten thousand dancing demons," he yells. "I may be too late to find it! Out of my way, by the high-hung, hammered, heated, hissing hot hinges of hell!"

And he tears through the door into the auction, almost knocking my rug out of my arms.

I shrug, and then I start to lug and tug. Carrying that rug home is a mean job. I walk along trying to remember that swell curse the old boy gives out with, because right now I am in a cursing mood. To make it worse, I can not even seem to hang on to the rug properly. It is all the time slipping down under my arm, hanging down in front

or wriggling out behind. With the result that I am tripping over the curb and walking sideways, and making very slow progress.

That is how Out-Of-Business Oscar manages to catch up with me before I get home.

I hear feet clicking behind me; somebody running very fast. And along comes Oscar, his face purple just like the old pappy who bumps into me.

"Oscar," I say, surprised, "I figure you are auctioning. What brings you here?"

"My conscience," Oscar gets out, puffing for breath. "Feep, I realize I play you a dirty trick when I make you take that rug. After all, you are working for me, and can you help it if the bidding goes wrong? It bothers me so much I have to drop everything and come after you. The thought of my misdeed stabs me to the quick. To the quick."

Now I do not know what Oscar's quick is, that he is being stabbed to, but I get interested right away. Oscar has me by the collar and his left hand grabs for the rug.

"I am going to give you your ten dollars back, Feep," he says. "Is that square?"

Well, it sounds square to me, and that is just what is wrong with it. Coming from a personality like Oscar, it should be crooked.

So I stall a little.

"Maybe I don't want to sell," I say.

Oscar's face gets almost black.

"You must," he begs. "This is on my conscience. It touches my heart."

Then I know he is lying. Because Oscar has no conscience, and his heart is so hard nothing can touch it except a pneumatic drill.

"I will keep the rug for my room," I say. "It will cover up the cigarette butts."

OSCAR splutters.

"I know how you feel and I don't blame you at all. Just to make it up for all your trouble, I'll give you fifteen dollars for it."

"No," I answer.

"Twenty."

Right then and there I get the score. Somebody else wants to buy this rug at a higher price, and Oscar thinks he can get it away from me. So I just shake my head and keep on going.

"This rug is not for sale," I yell. "And that's that!"

Oscar wails, but I ignore him and walk away. Now I can hardly wait to get home. I wonder just what kind of a rag this thing is. I remember Oscar telling about how Cleopatra comes rolled up in a rug, and I can just imagine unrolling it and seeing Lana Turner bounce out. Or anyway, something valuable and rare.

When I climb the stairs to my room I begin to get another idea. Perhaps somebody hides gold or jewels in the rug roll. Maybe some Arabs smuggle diamonds out of the country in it. Who can tell? The carpet is heavy enough, and it is tied up very tight indeed. I am very eager to open it up.

But just as I open the door, there is a rush on the stairs and who comes running up but the old pappy guy.

"Wait just another moment," he hollers. "You are Mr. Lefty Feep?"

"That's what my momma done told me," I admit.

"Oscar directs me here," he wheezes. "It is quite important."

"Who are you?" I ask.

"You read English? Here's my card—don't bend it," says the old fuddy. I take the card and read the name.

BLACK ART

Thaumaturgist

"What is this, a gag?" I ask. "In the first place, you are not a negro, and

in the second place what is a thaumaturgist—some kind of chiropractor?"

He gives me a little bow and a smile.

"I admit it is all a little unusual," he tells me. "But you see, a thaumaturgist is a magician. And Black Art is really a very appropriate name."

"Well I got no time to see any card tricks," I answer. "So if you will excuse me, I must go inside and milk a goat."

HE holds up his hand, and I see those deep red eyes of his burning at me again.

"Don't be a fool," he says, in a real soft voice, like a dentist's drill. "I am not a conjuror. I am a sorcerer. An evocator. An enchanter. A goetist. A geomancer."

"Calling yourself names won't help any, buddy," I tell him. But I am really impressed. It is dark in the hallway and here is this old man with his red eyes shining at me and his long skinny claws scrabbling at my coat.

"I want to buy your rug," he whispers.

"What, another?"

"Believe me, it is most important to me that I obtain it. I need it and I am prepared to pay well. I offer five hundred dollars."

"Five hundred—"

"A thousand, then. Money is no object. A thousand dollars for that rug!"

"Nelson Brothers should see me," I whisper. "I can be a star salesman."

But I am doing some quick figuring. First, Oscar wants to buy it back, and then this Black Art. Maybe they are both crazy. And then again—Oscar tells the crowd that this rug is wrapped up and shipped in and nobody sees it. He says Mrs. Bobo Grope pays big money for her stuff. Maybe the rug is worth the money. Maybe it is worth a lot more.

I think of the gold and jewels that might be hid away in it. I think about Cleopatra. And then I turn to Black Art and shake my head.

"No, I do not sell this rug," I tell him.

"Two thousand," he hisses.

"No."

It is very hard for me to say no this time. Two thousand is a very convincing argument, and his two eyes are also quite convincing. They glare at me, and when they look at the rug they are *hungry*.

"Come back some other time," I manage to say. "I must think it over."

"Very well, Mr. Feep. But Black Art is not to be foiled, I warn you! I shall get that rug, sooner or later."

And he beats it down the stairs.

I beat it indoors. Now I almost crazy to open this carpet up. I throw it on the floor and run into the closet to hang up my hat and coat. It is very dusty in the closet and I am coughing and clearing my eyes when I come out.

I look at the rug on the floor and then I rub my eyes some more.

Because the wires at the end of the rug are snapped.

I can swear they are tied a minute ago when I throw it down, but now they are untied. Thick wires, too. And the rug lies there.

I RUSH over and unroll it. Very careful, inch by inch, so if there are any jewels or coins wrapped inside I will not miss them.

But there is nothing there. I unroll the rug completely and it stretches across the floor. I stare at it.

What do I see?

A platinum border with jewels in the pattern? A gold fringe on a silver carpet? A solid weave made out of ten dollar bills and war bonds?

No.

I see a dirty, dingy old hunk of burlap I wouldn't use to cover the floor of a hen-coop. It is torn and ragged on the edges. The fringes are raveled and there is a pattern running through it that looks like a map of Hitler's retreat in Russia, and twice as messy.

And I refuse two thousand dollars for the thing!

I let out a whoop and hit myself on the forehead in rage. In fact, I hit myself quite a solid smack, and it knocks me so groggy I reel over to the washstand to put cold water on my noggin.

This I do, cursing under my breath and under the faucet. Then I wipe my head off and turn around again, feeling better.

But one look tells me I am still groggy. Worse.

I stare down at the rug I unroll on the floor. Only I do not have to stare *very far* down.

Because the rug is floating.

Floating in mid air!

That dirty old hunk of carpet, that hotel for Persian fleas, is floating around in the air, about a foot off the floor.

I just stand there with my mouth open, showing my adenoids and tonsils. Then I sneeze, because a cloud of dust rises from the rug while it swoops across the floor.

The damned thing is alive!

ALL at once I remember how it slips out from under my arm all the time I carry it, and how the wires break open of their own accord, and now I understand. The rug is alive. It moves by itself!

I am so upset I watch it without doing anything for a minute. And it floats up, moves over toward the open window. It is going out the window!

"No you don't." I remark, hurling myself across the floor and giving it the

flying tackle. No rug worth two thousand dollars is going to run off and leave me, even if it floats like Ivory Soap. I bring the rug down and hold it against the floor.

I pant for a minute, because it is a long time since I do a flying tackle, not running around with jitterbug girls any more. The rug sort of wriggles under me, like a big snake.

I reach over and grab a floor lamp and put it down on the carpet, anchoring it to the floor. Then I haul a chair over to hold it, and stick the fringes under the bedpost legs.

The rug thumps to the floor and lies still. I get off and stoop over to take another look. But it doesn't seem any different. It is still a dingy rag, all dirty and torn. I watch it, see it is quiet, and slip the lamp and chair off it. Then I squat down on it and try to scrape away the dirt to see if I can find some kind of pattern underneath which tells me what it is supposed to be.

All I get is a mouthful of dust. I sneeze again, and my temper blows out right through my nose.

"Blast the whole business," I yell. "I wish I do not get mixed up in such messes—why can't I be enjoying myself at a nice crap game at Gorilla Gabface's joint instead?"

All of a sudden there is a terrible wind blowing. I look around to see if I am still sneezing, but no. I am not making this wind. The rug is.

Because the rug is moving. And I am sitting on top of it!

This time we sail right for the open window, and through it. In another second, I am whizzing along through the air over the street, riding on the rug!

"Put me down!" I yell. But the wind chokes the voice right out of me. And before I can holler again, there is something caught in my throat. My heart.

Because we are zooming across the sky, over the streets and houses, and when I figure the speed I just lie down on my face and close my eyes. A second later I feel an awful thump and I know we have crashed. So I open my eyes and sit up.

THE first thing I look for is broken bones. But there are no broken bones. In fact, there are no bones at all—except two. These two bones are rolling right on the floor next to me. A four and a three.

Because when I open my eyes, I am sitting in the back room of Gorilla Gabface's pool hall, watching a crap game!

Here is an item for Ripley. I sit on the rug, wish I was at a crap game at Gorilla's joint, and the rug flies me there!

I look up, still confused, and see we come in through the open skylight. We come in very quiet, too, because nobody notices us, the rug and I.

They are all kneeling in a knot around the game on the floor—four of them, including Gorilla Gabface himself. And in front of them is a pile of lettuce big enough to choke Morgenthau. So it is no wonder they are too interested in the game to see me make my three-point landing.

I am very shaky, but I am beginning to understand a few things about the rug now. Why this Black Art the magician wants to buy it, and why it is such an unusual item. So I roll it up very tight under my arm before I move over to the game and introduce myself.

"Well, if it isn't Lefty Feep!" yells Gabface. "Another dog come to rattle these bones, I presume?"

Which means I am in the game.

Now I am very fond of African polo myself, in fact it is a sort of a passion with me. And I am indeed eager to rattle the ivories. But I do not wish

to lose this rug of mine, either, and it is such a tricky gadget I can not afford to let it out of my sight. I can not figure out where to park it, without a horse-anchor. Then I get an idea.

"I would dearly love to play marbles with you gentlemen," I say to these rats. "But I wish you to humor me a bit. I have here a piece I call my lucky carpet. I desire we should all shoot craps on its surface. Besides," I add, courteously, "I do not like to see you all kneeling on the bare floor this way. It is undignified, and it wrecks the knees of your trousers."

So they let me unroll the carpet and we all kneel down and I get the dice in my hands and begin to make like castanets with them.

IN A very short while I have enough lettuce in front of me to make a full-size Victory Garden, and I am very happy.

Every time I place the dice down I get either a seven or an eleven, and every point I roll I make.

I suppose this is all very technical talk to you, if you do not understand the intricate technique of shooting craps, but the idea is, I win a lot of money.

This does not please the others a small bit. Finally, when Gorilla Gabface gets the dice, he is very irate, having lost about two hundred berries. He grabs up the cubes in the oversize catcher's mitt he calls a hand and shakes them until the spots come loose.

"Now roll, curse you," he remarks, in a voice like thunder. But the storm breaks when he lets go of the dice and gets snake eyes—which means he loses. He picks up the dice again, very displeased, and they make a noise in his hand like a couple of skeletons doing calisthenics on a tin roof during a hail-storm.

"Come on," he chants. "Get going. Off to Buffalo."

That does it.

I make a mistake when I do not warn him in time. But it is too late now.

Because when he says "Off to Buffalo" the rug rises up with a bounce, and we are through the skylight. But quickly.

There is yelling and screaming and howling. All five of us get pitched forward into the center of the carpet, and we tangle up our arms and legs. Maybe it takes a minute, maybe it takes ten. Meanwhile we are howling through the night. And when I finally manage to get my head out from under that pile of jerking bodies, I look down at the ground and what do I see?

Niagara Falls!

We are off to Buffalo, all right!

We land about a minute later, right on the edge of town, in a vacant parking lot.

It is a moonless night, and I am glad, because if anybody sees us coming down the anti-aircraft will get busy in very short order. As it is, I have enough trouble explaining things to Gorilla Gabface and his pals. They are naturally flabber from gasted.

So I tell them the story.

"JEEZ!" remarks a character name of Dime-Mouth McCarthy, who is a scholarly type. "What youse got is probably that there Magic Carpet like in them Arabian Nights."

"Magic Carpet?" I say, while the idea suddenly clicks in the old brain.

"Sure," says Dime-Mouth. "A flying carpet, see? What them there oriental rug-cutters use to cruise around on it for a quick getaway. Just the thing to keep in the parlor for a powder, see? I always figure it is one of these here missological things, but youse can see I am wrong. On accounta

here it is. And there we are."

The other lugs listen to Dime-Mouth's explanation and shake their heads, trying to calm down.

"Now what do we do?" asks Gorilla Gabface.

"Maybe we can get it to take us back to town," Dime-Mouth suggests. "It don't cost nothing to try. There ain't no meter on it. If I was youse, Feep, I'd beat it back to the house in a hurry and wait for the customer to show up. He will pay big money for a rug like this."

"Yes, but why?" I ask. "What use has he got for it?"

"Very simple," Dime-Mouth tells me. "He shows up in a big limousine, doesn't he? That's it. He wants to put the car away and use the flying rug during the tire shortage."

This sounds logical to me, so we all hop back on the carpet.

"I wish to be back at Gorilla Gabface's," I say, very loud. And the rug swirls around, takes off, and we are on our way.

This time nobody is quite so frightened. Me, I am even getting used to traveling by air, so I look down on all the scenery as we pass, and in no time at all we are coming down into the street. Gorilla Gabface nearly gets his head knocked off when we skim under the telephone wires, but outside of that there is no trouble. The rug steers itself perfectly, and we sail through the skylight and land without even a bump.

The minute we are all landed, they crowd around me and begin to make with the brains. The whole gang is loaded with schemes.

"Why don't youse open a travel bureau?" suggests Dime-Mouth.

"Nuts to that. Use the rug for a taxi," says Gorilla Gabface.

Somebody else suggests sight-seeing tours over the town. And naturally,

there is a shifty-faced little rat in the crowd who comes out with a proposition to smuggle liquor.

This I turn down, of course; pointing out that it is not only dishonest, but also that there isn't enough room on the rug to carry much alky on a trip.

Besides, I do not wish to get myself all involved with these oafs on any deals, until I figure out this situation for myself. I have a Flying Carpet. It is such a matter as requires thought. I do not wish to go for a fly-by-night scheme.

So in the end I pop back onto the rug and say, "Home, James." The rug lifts me back out of the skylight and I fly through the air with the greatest of ease.

ALL the way home I wreck my brains trying to figure out what to do about all this. But when I finally glide in through the open window and land, a new problem arises.

It arises from the chair in my room, where it is sitting. And its name is Black Art, the thaumaturgist.

He stands there giving me the glare and stare when I come down. I flash him a weak smile and anchor the rug under the bedposts again, trying to act like nothing happens.

But it is no use. He can see what the score is.

"So," he greets me. "You know the secret."

I nod.

He shrugs, lifting his beard up and twisting the end. "Too bad. For years I search for the magic carpet in vain. I haunt the *souks* of Ispahan, Teheran, Damascus, Alepo. I comb the bazaars from here to Hyderabad. Agents of mine are on the trail of the fabulous Flying Carpet.

"And in the end, a silly woman, this Mrs. Bobo Grope, stumbles on the prize

by accident. She buys it as part of a lot consignment, never dreaming that she is acquiring the legendary rug of oriental fable. She dies. And a silly auctioneer raffles it off to a witless lout."

"You are wrong about that, pal," I correct. "I buy this rug myself."

He smiles.

"Well, let it pass. The important thing is that you now know the true value of this carpet. And I am again prepared to offer you a good price. Shall we say—ten thousand dollars?"

Now, there is nothing I rather hear somebody say than "ten thousand dollars." It is a very cute phrase and tickles my ears. But I am still playing my hunch, so I stall.

"Why is this rug worth ten grand to you?" I ask. "If you are one of these wizards like you claim, what do you need with a flying rug? The way I hear it, you guys can do almost anything you want."

Black Art sits down again and sighs. The wind ruffles his white beard. Then he sighs again and tears come into his eyes. He pulls up the end of his beard and wipes them away. Then he blows his nose.

"Being a wizard isn't so easy," he moans. "It is a terrible life. If you know how hard it is for me to get along, you would have pity on me and give me the rug."

"Don't sluff me that guff," I answer. "Wizards can do anything."

"You are wrong," says Black Art. "Maybe I can make you understand if I tell you my secret."

"Your secret?"

"Yes," Black Art whispers. "You see, I am the son of a witch."

DON'T tell me!"

"It is true," he sighs. "And I wonder if you know what it means? To be born in a horrible little cottage way

off in the woods. Without the comforts of a city home, without a furnace, without plumbing. Never to have a father. Never to have any other kids to play with. Just sit in this awful cottage all day long, with the horrid smell of sulphur and brimstone in the house.

"Your mother is always brewing up stuff on the fire—big cauldrons of herbs and awful messes that stink up the place. She brews so many philtres she doesn't have time to cook for you."

"I never have such an experience," I admit. "Though the way I remember it, Ma sometimes whips up some bathtub gin."

"That is different," Art sighs. "You don't have any toys to play with if you are the son of a witch. Just poppets—not dolls, but poppets. The little wax figures witches stick pins in. She gives them to you to play with and that's all. And that awful black cat—her familiar! If you pet it, it scratches you up in a jiffy."

"And then you are alone so much. She is always going out to Black Sabbaths and stuff, and her broomstick is never in the corner. On May Eve and Halloween, and all times during the year you are left alone in that hideous cottage. One time I remember drinking some love-philtres as a boy, when left home alone. They only upset my stomach."

Black Art sighs again.

"That's my life," he goes on. "No school. I have to study books on sorcery and black magic every day. Cast spells and study horoscopes, learn awful subjects like anthropomancy and lithiomancy, and divination. I work for years all alone. It is a dog's life. And when she dies, I am left to myself. Before I know it I am all mixed up with second mortgages to the Devil and a lot of legal stuff. I inherit nothing but a bunch of debts to demons. And I am

already an old man before my time.

"Look at me—look at my wrinkles and beard! Do I look like a young and happy man? Do I look as though I enjoyed practising magic powers?"

He starts crying, and my own eyes are a little misty. It does sound terrible. Imagine this poor enchanter—probably never even gets to see a floor show or play a juke box or do anything with culture!

"Then to make it worse, I find out I cannot even attend the Black Sabbath. On account of Ma falling down and busting her broomstick when she dies.

"You know what this means to a wizard? It means disgrace! It is like not attending union meetings or paying lodge dues. If I do not show up at least once a year at Sabbath meetings, I am all washed up."

THEN he explains to me about these Black Sabbaths, which are stag parties for witches and wizards. Sort of a picnic, like, only just a little wilder. They all get together on a hilltop or mountain over in Europe someplace and dance around for a while and talk shop. Then the Big Boss shows up and pitchforks around and gives them their orders for the coming year.

And this is what upsets Black Art so much.

Without the broomstick to ride on, he cannot get to his Sabbath. And there is one coming up pretty soon, on Halloween.

"What about a plane?" I ask.

"Don't be foolish! In the past, I travel by plane or boat. But with this war going on—how can I get to Europe? Or the Hartz Mountains? Priorities fix it so I cannot even buy a private plane for myself, let alone get booked as a passenger. And that is why I need your Flying Carpet. That is why I search for it. It is the one

means of transportation left to me—and unless I get to this Sabbath, it will be all up with me. All down, rather. Because the Big Boss has a nasty habit of disposing of we wizards when he is not obeyed."

Well, this song and dance he hands me has me all softened up. I figure I might as well take ten grand and let the carpet go. What good is it anyway? And if he has to get to this Black Sabbath of his—

"But just what arrangement have you got with the Big Boss?" I ask.

Black Art smiles.

"I see you are clever," he mumbles.

"So I will not conceal it from you. I am anxious to attend this Sabbath in particular, because it is my only chance to see the Big Boss. And if I can see him I am going to make a deal that will give me tremendous power. If you wish, you and I can share it together.

"Because you *are* right, Feep. A wizard *can* have anything he desires—if he will pay the price. You know what that price is. Your soul. You have a soul, haven't you, Feep?"

"I guess so."

"Good. I still have mine, too." Black Art chuckles. He is not so sad now, and the chuckle is something to hear. "Yes, even though I owe the Big Boss a number of debts, I still have my soul to bargain for. And I shall make a bargain."

IT is pretty dark in my room, but Black Art's eyes are shining very bright. His teeth gleam, too. Somehow I would feel better if I didn't see them so well. They bother me. So does his chuckling voice.

"Yes, and what a bargain it will be! Because I want power, Feep. Great power. Now, in a time of war, there will be new chances to rise, to rule. Imagine a wizard, with a knowledge of

spells and enchantments, capturing control of entire nations! Ruling armies! Directing destinies!

"I, who haunt in darkness, who must study and pore over musty tomes, waste my life as I do, am sick of sitting in the shadows. I want to rule. And the time is now.

"There is a man in Europe, Feep. A sick, neurotic, half-crazed man, who believes in magic. In astrology, and the stars. He is always willing to listen, to be guided by those who profess to be sorcerers. Fakes. But I am no charlatan. I want to get to that man—make him believe in me. Make myself his master. Give him orders and see that he obeys.

"That is the kind of bargain I am going to make at the Sabbath, Feep! Now do you understand why I must get there? Now do you see why I want your carpet?"

I see all right, and I do not like it a little bit.

"It is no dice, buddy," I tell him. "I still am not selling the rug."

Black Art stands up. I never noticed how tall he is before. How nasty he looks in his long black coat. He points a skinny finger at me.

"You dare to refuse, you miserable lout? Why, it means riches for you! You have nothing here—sitting in this dirty, dingy little room. Why, I wouldn't keep a pig in this filthy sty."

"Get out, then!" I holler. And push him over to the door.

"I'll be back!" he yells. But I slam the door on his beard, and it is all he can do to tug it out and bounce down the stairs.

I am really burned up now. I do not mind him suggesting a foul deal like he does, but when he tells me I live in a crummy dump, I get very angry.

Because I know only too well I *do* live in a crummy dump, and something

inside me tells me I am a fool not to take his ten thousand. Only I rather be a fool than a rat.

Still and all, my temper is ruined. It is late, and I must get some shut-eye, so I undress for bed. Just before I climb in, I remember the rug. I do not wish it to fly away on me, so I grab it off the floor and stick it in the closet and lock the door on it. The closet is so dusty I start to cough again and this makes me madder still.

I lie in bed and burn up. What a day! I get hooked into buying a rug, I get a reputation for being some kind of a screwball with all my friends, and a crazy magician comes around and threatens me.

Maybe he will show up again with some phony trick or other. But I do not think so. Anyhow, that is a problem for tomorrow.

So at last I fall asleep.

And I have a nightmare.

IN the nightmare it is the next morning. I am waking up when I hear a knocking at the door. I sit up and ask, "Who's there?" and a voice says, "Black Art," and I say, "Shut up and go away, you bewhiskered baboon!"

Then I turn over and all at once I hear a rustling sound. I sit up again.

I stare at the door.

Something is oozing in through the keyhole. Something white, like fog. A little cloud of smoke. It trickles in very slow and swirls around. All at once it gets thicker. There is a burning red center to the fog. Deep red. And then I recognize it.

It is the color of Black Art's eyes. Deep red eyes. And all at once a face forms around the eyes. And the fog turns into a long white beard. Then a body.

Black Art is standing in my room!

"I will teach you not to thwart a

wizard's desires!" he whispers.

Before I know it, he is over at the closet door. He opens it. I see him stooping over on the floor, scrabbling around. He picks up the rug. He comes out—

And then I do sit up in bed.

Because I am not dreaming. I am wide awake, and Black Art is stealing the rug before my eyes!

"Hey, you carpet-goniff!" I holler.

He just turns and looks at me.

His red eyes stare. I stare back. And all at once I find out I can't look away. I am what you call hypnotized. I gawk at him like he was a chorus cutie instead of an old geezer with a long white beard.

"So," he whispers. "A wizard has powers. And you are not going to move. I am taking your rug, Feep. I have a flying trip to make to the Hartz Mountains. There is just time enough to make it."

He steps on the carpet and stands in front of the open window. I try to jerk my eyes away. All at once I do it. I jump out of bed.

Black Art smiles. One hand goes to his waist. I think he is pulling a rod on me, but no. He just lifts up his beard. I see underneath it. Hanging from his neck, hidden by the beard, is a very long, very sharp knife. He takes it out and waves it. I can see he is used to waving it.

"Do you like mince-meat?" he asks.

"Well, that is what you will be if you come one step closer to me."

So I just stand there while he gets on the rug. He pulls his beard to one side like it was a handkerchief and waves goodbye.

"Well, I am off," he tells me. And then he stares at the rug and mumbles, "Hartz Mountains, please."

The rug gives a flap, and floats out the window.

I SHIVER myself out of it. There he goes. It is all over. My rug is gone, he is gone, and that deal is going through. There will be hell to pay—and I know who will pay it. All of us, if Black Art has his way.

And then, while I am standing there, I hear a thump.

It comes from just outside my window.

I rush over and look out.

There is a terrible crash from down below, and I stare at the back alley. Lying on the stones is Black Art. On top of him, like a shroud, is the Flying Carpet.

I am downstairs in three leaps. I pick Art up and phone for an ambulance. First I hide the rug. When the medicos get there I tell them he falls out of the window—and after one look at the body, they believe me.

And when they go away I take a look at my rug again.

Then I understand what happens. I take another look at my closet and get the whole story straight.

For the first time in my life, I thank my lucky stars that Black Art is right when he says I live in a dirty old dump.

Because that is the one thing that saves us all from the bargain Black Art wants to make.

Of course, the rug is no good any more since it does not fly, and I throw it in the ash heap. But maybe it is just as well the way things work out. I got a bicycle to travel by, anyway.

* * *

I SAT back in my seat with a frown.

"Sounds like you had a pretty close call there, Lefty," I admitted. "But—"

Feep gave me a sour look.

"You and your 'Buts.' Always something bothering you, friend! Well—what is it this time?"

"Nothing," I said. "Nothing at all."

Only, you see I can't figure out what it was that made the Flying Carpet fall down and kill the wizard. It always flew before, didn't it?"

"Yes."

"So why did it fall?"

"That is my lucky break," Feep said. "Like I say, if I take the ten thousand dollars, I never get rid of this Black Art and he goes out and does his dirty work. It is pure luck that I refuse and he gets bumped off."

"How do you figure that?"

"Well—if I take the ten thousand, I move out of my room, into a better apartment. And you know what a

dump I live in. All dirty and dusty. And if I am not in my dirty and dusty apartment, then I do not put my rug overnight into the dirty and dusty closet, and it does not get fixed there so that it will not fly any more."

"You mean keeping that rug in the closet overnight killed Black Art when he used it?"

"Sure. That is the lucky break. Because of what happens in the closet to the rug—what gets into it to make it fall down."

"All right, Feep! Just what did get into the Flying Carpet, anyway?"

"Moths!" said Lefty Feep.

15,000 YEARS OLD

—AND STILL GROWING!

AUSTRALIA, the home of the Anzacs and, at the present time, our own General MacArthur, just can't seem to stay out of the news. This article, however, only deals with a more peaceful aspect of Australia.

It seems that a certain Professor Chamberlain of Chicago University had spent a few years encircling the globe conducting some research and collecting data on the macrozamia, a tree that resembles the palm tree in appearance and one that lives for centuries. He found the macrozamia in many regions of the world, though he had discovered the largest and oldest in South Africa where they grew as tall as seven feet.

But just imagine his surprise and delight when he entered the Tamborine Mountain reserve at Queensland, Australia, and saw a whole grove of macrozamia that made the South African trees look like young saplings.

The youngest tree in the grove was only three feet in height but was already 3,000 years old. Some of the trees had reached a height of twenty feet and were judged to be about 15,000 years old by Professor Chamberlain. These trees were all in perfect condition and still growing.

The Professor also discovered a cone from the macrozamia tree that weighed 85 pounds, which was almost $2\frac{1}{2}$ times as heavy as the largest cone found in South Africa. This giant cone contained 151 seeds which Professor Chamberlain took back to America and distributed among the national parks and there planted.

Each of the seeds was found to have successfully "taken root" in our good American soil so that Americans for at least 15,000 years in the future will be able to see a descendant of the oldest living thing on earth—growing in any one of our national parks.

ALLERGICS LEAD THE WAY

TWO eminent psychologists reported to a meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association that, according to tests recently completed, allergic children tend to be more intelligent than normal children and they also tend to be leaders of their group.

Tests to determine the children's personality were conducted on 139 allergic and 117 normal children within an age range of eight to sixteen years. Results of the tests showed that the qualities of leadership were more predominant among

the allergic than among the normal children. The allergics would not take a "back seat" for anyone and would quickly speak up for their rights. Allergics proved to be the "life" of the party, free spenders and not easily disturbed by mistakes they made.

The skin allergics showed a greater tendency toward leadership than other types of allergics, while those children having both a skin and other allergy tended to be a little unstable in their emotions.

The SCARLET



The horrid red spheres rolled up challengingly

ROLLERS

by Stanton A.
COBLENTZ



Weird scarlet spheres came from Mars, and Stephen Mallory volunteered to stop them!

AT LAST the story can be told. Now that the War of Five Continents is over and the world is reforming itself out of the wreckage, I may for the first time reveal a certain all-important episode. I, Stephen Mallory, member of the United Americas Secret Service and volunteer for a perilous one-man mission, have been authorized by my chiefs to tell of the whole extraordinary affair, now that the information can no longer benefit the enemy.

It was in 1989, at the outbreak of the conflict, that I conceived the idea of smuggling myself into the great Cen-

tral European capital of Rosol, which Junthau the "Crimson Dictator" had erected during the twenty years of his infamous reign. I will have to confess, however, that my motives were not merely patriotic. My engagement to Bess Northcott had just been broken off, as the result of a misunderstanding. I will never forget how she stood before me with a fiery insolent light in her snapping golden-brown eyes, flinging back my ring at me, and crying, "You haven't the spunk of a rabbit, you weak little puppy!" And all because I didn't show the "he-man stuff" to Mike Lannon and pitch him out of

the window when she thought his language to her was objectionable and I could see that he really hadn't meant anything out of the way!

Well, anyhow, here was our idyll broken off—broken off for good, too, because I wouldn't take her back now even if she got down on her knees to me! I was madder than if my sore toe had been trodden on. So I hadn't any spunk, hadn't I? Well then, I would show her! This was what made me think of making the mission to Rosol. At first the scheme seemed so wild that Beardsley, our department head, wouldn't even listen to it. But I argued that, owing to several years' residence abroad, I was thoroughly acquainted with the Central European dialects; that I knew the ways and customs of the country, and, with a little skill, could be rigged up to look like a Central European; and that, in any case, no risk would be too great if I could worm myself into Junthau's headquarters and ferret out his secrets.

For days I was haunted by the look in Beardsley's eyes. It was exactly the look one would give to a man under sentence of death. "Well, Steve, want us to say prayers for the repose of your soul?" he asked, with a half facetious laugh.

"Better say prayers for Junthau!" I retorted.

A few days later, after our plans had been carefully worked out, I slipped away. I nearly lost my life at the first try, when a United Americas scouting plane dropped me one night by parachute over the farm-lands a few miles from Rosol. If I hadn't come down in a clump of trees, which broke my flight, and saved my neck . . . But I won't go into that, as I want to plunge on to more important events. Of course, I was equipped with forged papers; and, of course, I was in disguise, being made

to look like a broken-down old fellow of sixty-five—one of those amiable doddering dolts who seem too harmless to step on a worm. I made my way by night to the city, and immediately looked for work—any menial job that would keep soul and body together.

MY FIRST employment was as janitor in a night club, where I picked up some interesting bits of gossip, and, by doing little favors, gradually worked myself into the good graces of some of the diplomats and statesmen who occasionally came there for a gay hour.

Still, it was more than a year before I was able to get the opening I wanted. Then one night, seeing that Maximilian Dohr, the Secretary of Finance, was in a particularly good mood after his wine, I complained to him about my wages, which, I said, were not nearly enough for my crippled daughter and myself.

"Why, Pop, what you getting?" he asked.

I told him; and he said, "Good Lord, that's a shame, Pop!"—for the amount really was disgracefully small.

"Maybe sir, you with your influence could get me something better," I proposed, very respectfully.

"Maybe I could, Pop," he answered, smiling as pleasantly as you always do on some one who has made you feel beneficent. "We'll see what can be done."

The next night he came back, and said he had made inquiries, and they could use another man to do odd jobs over at the Red House—which was the palatial building where Junthau lived and carried on his affairs of state.

Of course, I leapt at the opportunity.

By this time the war had been raging for about sixteen months, and had reached a state of deadlock. Already, it was estimated, a hundred million lives had been lost, five million square miles

of territory had been ravaged, three thousand ships had gone to the bottom of the sea, and ten thousand towns had been blasted or burned. And all for what? Junthau, who had started the trouble with an unprovoked attack upon the two Americas, was balked by the bravery, skill and resources of his adversaries. But since we in turn had not the necessary edge of power to overcome Junthau's armies, navies and air fleets, it seemed likely that the struggle would drag on indefinitely.

For this reason, my mission was even more important than I had imagined. If I had known what a responsibility would rest on my shoulders, would I have had the necessary courage?

In any case, my ex-fiancee could not have said I lacked spunk had she seen me, by day, polishing brass railings and waxing ballroom floors; and then sneaking by night to a basement in a remote part of the city, where I had installed a short-wave transmitter, by which I kept in touch with Washington. Well I knew what the penalty would be if one of the Makalo, or secret police, should suspect that the bent and shambling old man was not all that he appeared to be! I well remember how I shuddered, for fear of detection, the time I pulled two perfectly good front teeth to simulate an appearance of decrepitude; and how I took elaborate precautions whenever I used the dye that kept my hair and moustache an elderly gray, while secretly I blessed my tendency to premature baldness.

But my most risky undertaking—and one that might easily have cost me my neck—was the installation of a small secret microphone behind a panel in the wall of Junthau's council-room. This feat, which was accomplished late at night after all the other servants had retired, would enable me to listen by means of head-phones from the cubby-

hole where I slept several floors below, and overhear whatever went on in the council-room.

Only a few days after planting the microphone, I made the first of those startling, those unbelievable discoveries that were to make my stay in Rosol, now that I look back upon it, appear like a mad episode on another planet.

II

WHAT a start I gave when the rasping, screechy voice of Junthau came to me over the radio! It was a voice that no one who had heard it would ever forget—and who had not heard it during one of those two-hour broadcasts we all had to listen to if we valued our necks? On the present occasion, the dictator's tones were not less shrill and subtly disagreeable than in his public harangues; but they were more jerky than usual, and even angrier.

"No, Kandov, you are wrong!" he screamed—Kandov being his Viceroy of Foreign Affairs. "We cannot win this war without heroic measures! I—I, Junthau, have a plan in mind. A plan that only the stout-hearted would embrace. But, by my sword! it will give us the war!"

"What is the plan, Your Graciousness?" came in honey-dripping tones in the voice of Angus Bibb, the Secretary of Censorship.

"My stars! it will go down in history as the crowning achievement of the ages! Listen! and say if this is not an inspiration of genius!"

There followed several sentences that I could not make out. Then clearly these words came to me as I lay huddled in a corner with my headphones:

"Yes, we have perfected the system of communication. For months we have been talking with the Scarlet Rollers. . . . These Martians are a most

warlike race, with many advanced weapons, beyond our earthly conception. No need to go into details; it is enough to know that, with the use of these weapons, we could annihilate those hounds of Americans almost overnight."

There ensued a pause, during which I seemed to hear the heavy breathing of many men.

"Then they will tell us, Excellency, the secret of their weapons?" came a respectful voice.

"Better than that! They will come down here themselves, and use them for us!"

"But Excellency, how is that possible? Have you worked out a method of interplanetary travel?"

"That is not necessary! The Martians worked out a method ages ago. All that was necessary was a safe landing system. Why, dozen of them have actually come down here at various times, but, not knowing enough about our terrain and our changeable meteorological conditions, have all been killed in the attempt to alight. However, by means of proper signalling, we can solve that problem for them. An advance contingent is already on the way."

I COULD hear the gasps of astonishment from many throats.

"Yes, my friends, that is my surprise for you! The great surprise I have prepared for my enemies—for the world! The stroke that will make me the planet's master!"

Junthau's voice had risen to a hysterical squeak that rendered it difficult to follow all his words. I almost dug the headphones into my ears in my eagerness not to miss a syllable.

"Not only are the Scarlet Rollers on their way here!" he ejaculated. "They will be here before—"

I was never to hear the end of the sentence. There came a sound that made me leap as from an electric shock. It was no more than a rap on the door, but to my startled imagination it was the dread Makalo, the secret police!

With the speed of delirium, I hid the radio gear under the straw of my matting.

The knock was repeated, more insistent this time.

Never had I been nearer to losing my nerve. Upon unsteady limbs I staggered toward the door, certain that a pair of dark scowling faces and the muzzles of a brace of revolvers would greet me.

Imagine then my relief when I stared into the demure features of pretty young Helva, one of the chambermaids!

"Please, Mr. Iglio," she said—this being the name I had assumed—"couldn't you help me move the big sofa in the Purple Salon? I have to clean behind it, and thought you wouldn't mind."

As I shambled away with her, staring into her clear sparkling eyes, I wondered. Could she be an agent of the Makalo? Or had she some secret purpose of her own? For there was something enigmatic about her manner, something which suggested that it was not the mere wish to clean behind a sofa that had brought her to me that day.

III

I FORESAW that I would not get a polite answer when I radioed my chief in Washington that Junthau was obtaining aid from Mars. Yet probably my face blushed redder than the traditional lobster as I deciphered the code reply. "For God's sake, Mallory, cut out the drinking! You're out on a secret mission—not on a spree!"

Useless to plead that I had not so

much as touched a bottle since reaching Rosol!

Nevertheless, I did suspect that I was drunk only a day or two later. No sober man, certainly, had ever seen what I saw! Listening over my secret radio, I heard Junthau announce to his ministers, "Tonight's the time! Midnight precisely at the Gammer Airport!"

Now, of course, I did not know what this referred to. Junthau might have been expecting a delegation from the Balkans or South Africa, for all that I could say. But, in any case, it was my duty to investigate. To smuggle myself into the airport under cover of darkness was not too difficult, although I would not have lived to repeat the offense had I been caught. But a broken-down, tottering old man could attract little attention when he puffed wearily along toward the airport, seemingly on his way home. And there were none to see how that old man straightened out in the darkness, scaled the fence at its furthest, dimmest corner, clipped off the barbed wire with tools designed for that purpose, and let himself down into the field.

Long before midnight, I was stretched out flat beneath a concealing mass of old sacks at one end of the airport. Yet although perfectly hidden in the shadows, I could see well enough when of a sudden all the lights went on.

Half a score of black-clad dignitaries had entered at a gate at the further end, surrounded by the seven-foot giants of Junthau's Elite Guard. In their center, I was certain, was the swarthy diminutive form of Junthau.

Perhaps fifteen minutes went by, and nothing happened . . . fifteen minutes of the longest waiting I had ever endured. What if the Makalo had observed the cut wire, and were combing every inch of the place?

My thoughts were diverted as several

blinding flashes of white light, like gigantic magnesium flares, burst across the heavens high above. With meteoric speed, they descended. I had to cover my eyes, to shield them from the painful brilliance; and when at length I could look again, several weird glaring structures, shaped like beehives and each about fifty feet tall, stood on the field across from me. Was I dreaming? I could almost believe so as, while I stared in a daze, wide round openings appeared at the base of each of the edifices, and an extraordinary freight rumbled forth.

BUT perhaps I should not say "freight." These were living creatures. Yes, living! Although unlike any form of life I had ever encountered before. In the dazzling light, they shone perfectly revealed; each of them a brilliantly scarlet spherical object about five feet thick! They moved by rolling themselves along the ground, like enormous rubber balls; and scores of minute wriggling limbs, which flashed out of pockets in their leathery skins and then flashed back again, provided the motive power!

At first it seemed to me that they were headless. But after a moment, when they came to a halt, a smaller sphere popped out of each of the larger ones, and twisted about at every angle as if on elastic joints. Stranger still! Each of these smaller spheres was crowned with a balefully glaring blood-red eye, which cast hot beams about it like a crimson searchlight. At the same time, just under the eye, a pouch-like aperture opened with the most horrible twisting grimaces; and from each of these mouths came a stertorian cry, which struck me as a good cross between the bellowing of a bull and the screeching of a factory siren.

To complete this macabre picture,

the black-clad dignitaries came slowly forward; and I was sure that I saw the lean figure of Junthau bowing, yes, reverentially bowing before the foremost of the spherical scarlet monsters!

THE gloomiest season in the history of the Americas was undoubtedly the fall of 1990. It was then that Junthau, like a tiger springing from ambush, turned upon us with his "secret weapon." No! not with one secret weapon! With a whole battery of secret weapons! Just when our country was beginning to feel secure; just when President Marshall had confidently announced that Junthau would be destroyed within a year; just when we had transported an army of millions overseas and were opening the offensive that was to break the deadlock—just then Junthau struck, and all hell, literally, seemed to burst loose.

Of course, if officials had heeded the frantic messages which I continually flashed to Washington, we might not have been taken by surprise. Even so, what could we have done? For there were no human tools to meet the onslaught. How repel the projectiles released by electrical springs, which exerting more pressure than dynamite, hurled the missiles on hundred-mile flights through the stratosphere? How resist the inconspicuous little dust-colored pellets that, scattered over thousands of square yards, would produce wounds more dangerous than a serpent's bite if one so much as approached them? How counteract the poison gas which, odorless and colorless, could not be observed for hours after it was inhaled, when the victim would be seized by agonizing paroxysms and suddenly collapse and die?

It was into such obstacles that our offensive ran full-tilt. Even today there is no record of how many of our brave

boys perished beneath the cruel new weapons. The worst of it was that we could not "establish contact" with the foe; in fact, our men never saw the foe at all; the attacks were always aimed from a great distance, and even our air fleet failed to locate the enemy, since they paid no heed to the occasional round objects they saw rolling far beneath.

And this despite the fact that I repeated the dread truth in every report I radioed to Washington! By this time, doubtless, I was regarded as having cracked beneath the strain, and no one took time to decode my lunacy.

Yet what I had learned was enough to make the hair prickle on the head of every American. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Scarlet Rollers had arrived; and they were preparing to send huge squadrons directly to our hemisphere, which they would subjugate within a few weeks. Against such an attack, no human resistance would be possible.

AMONG all the strange happenings of those distracted days, the thing that appeared strangest to me was that all the fighting was done by the Martians; the warriors of Junthau had nothing whatever to do while the invaders from space blasted us with their lethal weapons.

Yet in this very fact our salvation rested. Or so, at least, I surmised one evening when, as usual, I was eavesdropping by radio on the talks in Junthau's council-room.

Shrill and troubled, the voice of the dictator came to me with its characteristic squeak,

"Listen, Von Badlitz! Those Martians gain too much power! Why, they will not let us use their weapons!—will not even show us the secret! The possibilities are perilous!"

"Just so, Excellency!" returned the heavy voice of Kurt von Badlitz, Minister of Undercover Warfare. "I confess that I, too, am worried. But what am I to do? The Martians are winning the war for us, are they not? Without them, as you yourself have said, we could not win."

"And with them we cannot win! True, we can wipe out those curs of Americans. But, by my steel helmet! our allies are more dangerous than our enemies! When the war is over, who will rule the earth? Me? Or one of those cursed Scarlet Rollers?"

"But there is nothing we can do, Excellency—"

It was just at this point, when I was straining every nerve not to miss any of the conversation, that there again came a rapping at the door. And again, after I had hurriedly hidden the radio, I opened to confront Helva, the chambermaid.

Her bright young eyes glittered with a knowing light as she put one hand to her lips. "Careful, my friend," she whispered. "The Makalo are about."

As I stared into her clear, eager face, I knew much that did not need to be spoken. She understood that I was not the dotard I assumed to be! She was not really a chambermaid; she represented a secret friendly force!

Hence a sudden warmth of feeling arose within me—a warmth that, I must admit, was quite unrelated to the purposes of espionage.

IV

EVENTS from this time forth moved, literally, at lightning speed. It was only about ten days later that the world was startled by the so-called Stirtgart case—one of the most surprising episodes in the War of Five Continents. Ernst Stirtgart, Minister of

Foreign Affairs and right-hand man in Junthau's cabinet, had been arrested on the shores of the Potomac, having landed at night from a submarine! Amid the floods of excited speculations and explanations, commentators unanimously missed the truth, which, as I learned by radio, was that Stirtgart was the bearer of a secret peace offer! It was proposed that the Five Continents heal their differences and join hands in a common war upon the Martians!

If our State Department had not been pursuing its traditional oyster policy, it would have realized that there was merit in this plea. It would have known that the earth was menaced with a peril that would have required all its resources of defense. But Secretary of State Monoway, as might have been expected, took no measures except to see that Stirtgart was made a prisoner of war. And the conflict continued as before, with our expeditionary forces in Europe daily suffering uncounted casualties, without effective means of striking back.

One thing was evident to me, as I agonizingly followed the course of events. Junthau might eventually be overwhelmed by the Scarlet Rollers. But, long before that time, all the rest of the world would be overcome by Junthau.

It was at about this time that I discovered the vulnerable point, the Achilles' heel, of the Martians.

Had it not been for Helva, this would not have been possible. Gradually an understanding was growing between us. Occasionally, for a minute or two, we would confer on some landing of the back stairs or behind a basement door. Our talk was always in whispers, and was notable for what we left unsaid. Yet it was clear that she knew in whose service I worked; she had been in America, and had observed slight, al-

most unnoticeable Americanisms in my speech and manners; while I, for my part, was convinced that she was employed by the Trepidu, an underground rebel organization working for the downfall of Junthau. A phrase or two from her lips had convinced me of this—a phrase or two uttered almost inaudibly, the words coming like threats from between her clenched teeth. “My father—my brothers—slain by the Makalo! I have sworn to avenge them!”

Seeing her lovely young eyes narrowing to fiery sparks of determination, I could not doubt her sincerity.

BUT to return to the point. Through members of her organization, Helva had learned many things regarding the Scarlet Rollers. They lived, all of them, in a great underground retreat which they had obliged Junthau to dig—a cavern equipped with enormous dehumidifiers to keep them oven-dry. Though they personally made all the attacks upon the American forces, these attacks were invariably conducted on clear dry days and after elaborate weather observations. When it was raining, or even when the atmosphere was obscured with cloud or fog, the Martians remained underground. Moreover, none of them had ever been seen near a river, lake or seacoast!

In themselves, these facts might not have meant much. But taken in connection with still another circumstance, they struck me as possibly significant. Upon Mars, it is known, there is little water. The atmosphere, even in the most irrigated districts, is drier than our most arid deserts. Hence the bodies of the Martians might not be adapted to contact with water. It might be injurious to them! It might even be poisonous!

Now, of course, this was a mere theory

on my part. But I was determined to put it to the test. If I could only sprinkle some water on a Martian, I would have my answer! But how was this possible? To approach near enough to the Martians to perform any experiment appeared hardly less difficult than to reach Mars itself! Then one day I learned from my radio that several of the Rollers were to meet Junthau in a closed courtyard adjoining the Red House, in order to observe some military maneuvers. And instantly I recognized my chance.

At the specified hour, I was on the roof of the Red House, with a pail of water and a mop. No one could have doubted that I was anything but a weary old drudge engaged in his daily drab routines. Yet, as I worked, my ears were alert, my eyes took in the details of the courtyard four stories beneath. Never had I been under greater tension than when finally the sound of horns and drums announced the arrival of the visitors and five of the scarlet ones, preceded and followed by a military escort, came rolling down the stone-walled alley, which, being just wide enough to permit them to pass, would force them to go directly under me.

In a seemingly negligent manner, I had placed the pail at the edge of the roof, while running the mop in long swaths along the flat surface. The Martians approached. As carefully as a rifleman aiming his fire, I timed my stroke. They drew still nearer. At length I heard the foremost of them rumbling just below. Now, I knew, I could not miss. No one—even if any one saw what happened—could impute any criminal intention to my clumsy misstroke.

Plop! The mop came down against the pail! And the pail sailed off the roof. Almost instantly, as I crouched

low and stared down for a grandstand view, there burst forth such a pandemonium as I had not even imagined to be possible.

THE third in the procession of Martians, his curved back dripping, had let out a noise like the howls of an enraged tiger. Where the water had struck, something was sizzling savagely. Almost instantly, he began rolling round and round on the pavement, like a spinning top, as if trying to put out a fire. His companions, instead of rushing to his rescue, started rolling away with a panicky haste, while letting out shrieks of terror so shrill that my eardrums ached. Such was their mad stampede that several guards, crushed against the wall, were severely bruised, and added their own cries to the uproar. At the same time, the wet Martian, as he rolled wildly about, began squirting jets of blue liquid from innumerable orifices in his body; and three or four soldiers, their skins struck by the fluid, screamed, crumbled up, and grew stiff and silent.

After a minute, the Martian gradually ceased his vehement rolling. He uttered a long-drawn sigh; his ugly bulb of a head lolled out limply, and his hideous red eye lost its luster and turned black.

Even so, I had difficulty in realizing that he was dying.

Amid the confusion of the moment, no one had observed the cause of it all. Nor was it long before, having seen all that was necessary, I had withdrawn to a position of safety.

As I was about to slip down from the roof, whom should I meet but Helva! Her keen blue eyes were glistening with approval.

"You have done well, my friend," she whispered. "Can you meet me here tonight at eight?"

V

SIDE by side in the starlight we crouched on the roof. In a two-hour conference, we planned our grand strategy. Every now and then one of us would arise and tiptoe to the doorway, to make sure that no spy was lurking near. Nothing could have been eerier than the way in which we pressed close to one another, plotting the moves that might mean the world's salvation, though aware that we would pay with our necks should we be discovered. Yet despite the peril, despite the high stakes for which we gambled, my hands reached for hers, and their soft returning pressure gave me a thrill that I had never felt from the cold, aloof Bess Northcott.

But our lips could not give themselves to anything personal—no, not yet! "My friend, you have confirmed what I already suspected," she began. "Water is deadly to the Martians, who are not acclimated to it. I suppose their bodies are built on a different chemistry from ours."

"Probably the effect is like that of water on the metal sodium," I suggested, remembering the fierce bubbling reaction of the latter as it dissolves in H_2O . "That means that, in order to wipe out the Martians, all we need do is get them good and wet."

"Yes, but even if we do wipe them out," she regretted, "will we be any better off? Remember, there will still be Junthau!"

"Let's crush one evil at a time," I recommended. "First concentrate on the Martians."

She uttered a low murmur of agreement; and gradually our plans took form. "You must join us—join the Trepidu!" she urged, thus openly acknowledging her membership in the se-

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AN ANGEL WITH



Red stared in amazement—for he saw four separate faces!

by
**DON
WILCOX**

Because Red saw four faces when he looked through the strange glasses, the fate of the Allied Nations forces in the Pacific was in his hands!

IT WOULDN'T be a firing squad," the big cool Englishman observed. "These Japs don't waste bullets. They'll run us through with bayonets. It's simpler."

The young copper-complexioned American shuffled nervously, clanking the long ground chain to which his feet were fastened.

"Relax, buddy," the Englishman said. "In ten minutes it'll all be over."

The young American nodded. The ragged strips of what had once been a shirt kept slipping off his shoulders. Anyway his hands had something to do

FOUR FACES ☆



besides twitch. He was the last man in the line of doomed men.

He studied the big Roman-nosed Englishman with curiosity. A fine looking guy, all right. Soft, though. Whatever part he'd had in this Pacific clam-bake, it was a cinch he'd kept in the shade. His hands were white, and his thoughtful face hadn't even been sunburnt.

He was getting it now, though, on the back of the neck. The hot forenoon sun was reflecting off a temple wall that served as an execution ground.

"What charges did they hook on

you?" the American asked.

"Spy. Yours?"

"I don't know. They wouldn't tell me anything, the damned rats," the American sneered bitterly. "My memory's all shot. I don't even know how I got here. Anyway I wish t'hell they'd get it over with. . . . You're cool, fellow. How do you manage?"

"Guess I've got it coming," said the Englishman.

"You were a spy?"

"No. But I should have been, instead of skylarking around putting on entertainments for soldiers."

Steamy clouds passed across the sun, sweeping the line of prisoners under a blue shadow. The bomb-ragged towers and spires of Singapore changed color under the coasting patches of light. But the bayonets of the Japanese guard milling about on the dusty temple walks lost none of their hard glitter.

Two more squads of the little brown soldiers approached, marching beside a bright canvas-topped vehicle drawn by three natives. Those, the Englishman guessed, would be Axis aristocrats coming to witness the morning show.

"You seem to know all about this place," said the American.

"They've been executing us for the last three mornings," said the Englishman. "It's their regular bayonet drill. They use up about twenty of us at a time and save the rest for tomorrow. But now we're down to eighteen, including you. By the way, where'd you come from?"

"I don't know."

The American said it carelessly. He was preoccupied with watching the native-drawn carriage as it ground along over the temple promenade. The two well-dressed passengers, a man and a woman, were inspecting the short row of prisoners as a staff might review troops.

THE big thoughtful Englishman kept on talking.

His name was Longworth, he said. He had been conducting miscellaneous entertainments at the soldiers' and sailors' recreation camps in the Philippines, Hongkong, and Australia. He was an oldtime song and dance man, and could lead group singing. Then, too, he tried a little magic on the side, and wasn't half bad for an amateur.

"I was a sap to get caught here in Singapore. That's what a hobby will do for you. You know Singapore's

reputation. Oriental mysteries by the thousands. There's supposed to be an underground world of magic and evil and all such rot."

The American didn't answer. He was scarcely hearing. Maybe he was watching the preparation for action. Maybe he was pondering about life—the strangeness of leaving it without memories.

"Anyway," said Longworth, "I was underground, trading gossip with a fakir who claimed to be a couple centuries old, when the Japs bounded in on us. What happened? The old mystic tried to weave a spell with a revolver. Maybe it was two centuries old, too. The Japs cut him up. They took me in for questioning. I didn't have any answers.

"Did you have any weapons?"

"No. All I had was—" Longworth gave a short bitter laugh. "Funny thing. They never bothered taking any of my junk away from me."

From his pocket he took a small pack of pictures.

"Want to look at a few decent faces?" He handed them to the American. "Those are some snaps of the old dance band and the chorus gals brought from Canada—"

"Who's this good looker?"

"That blonde? Some American kid down in Australia. Can't remember her name. She wasn't a regular, but we needed a singer—"

"I've seen her before."

"Could be. Where?"

"Hell, I don't remember. But I've seen her."

"Buddy, your past is heavy on the dim side."

"Too damned dim. I musta got a bump."

The Englishman brought a pair of thick-lensed spectacles from his pocket, fitted them to his eyes, and gave the American a penetrating look.

"Where did you say you came from?"

"I said I didn't remember."

"By George, you're not lying. You don't remember."

The American frowned. He needed his last minutes to think. He was trying to bring back that mad fight in the jungle—and that flight. Where had he learned to fly?

Why had he flown *here*?

But he couldn't have known. The name of Singapore, when Longworth had first spoken it, had failed to bring any clear recollections. Wasn't Singapore supposed to be friendly—not a place where Japs lined you up for bayonet practice?

Longworth removed his spectacles and handed them over.

"Try these, buddy. You'll be surprised—Hsssh."

The native-drawn vehicle stopped before them, and the brightness of its striped canvas top glared in the American's eyes. The woman passenger was staring at him.

"By George," the Englishman muttered under his breath, "that looks like Hester Wembridge — you know — the philanthropist—"

"Wembridge?" the American whispered. "I don't know the name." Unconsciously he slipped the spectacles into his pocket.

"What the devil's she doing here? If they find out who she is, she'll be lined up with us. She's the one who's given wads of money for military recreation halls. She was in Hongkong when I was there. She flies around—but how'd she get caught here?"

"Or *is* she caught?" the American whispered skeptically. "She had a Japanese escort, you know."

The carriage went on, stopping at the gate where Japanese officers were stationed.

"That fellow with her—I've seen

him too. He's her business manager. I'll bet they're pulling a fast one on the Japs."

"Or the Allies?"

"You're a cynical cuss," said the Englishman with his puzzling coolness. "But I don't blame you, lined up for death when you don't know what it's all about . . . Did you try those spectacles? Might as well entertain yourself."

"Here come the bayonets," said the American, and he didn't bother to pull the ragged strips of shirt over his bronzed shoulders . . .

The charge came hard and fast. Right down the line. One prisoner after another went down. The American would be the last.

The dull swishes came closer. Steel through flesh.

It was the last agonizing moment. The big Englishman's turn had come. Feet rushed toward him, knives plunged. The ground chain clanked and jerked.

The young American felt the jerk at his feet and knew Longworth had gone down. He closed his eyes and waited.

But the sudden yelling of the Japs forced him to look to his left. The bayonet drill had stopped. The soldiers who had rammed Longworth were in a frenzy. *Longworth was gone.*

Other Jap soldiers came running out to the end of the line, jabbering wildly. They were pointing at the spot where the big Englishman had fallen—where he had vanished.

The young American gazed dumb-founded. There was not even a drop of blood to mark his friend's fall. He had completely disappeared.

A minute later a squad marched up to escort the American off the field. Officers had countermanded the order for his execution, he was told, as a special favor to "some honorable friends."

CHAPTER II

THEY took off in Hester Wembridge's private plane, and not a single ack-ack disturbed the peace of the wide open skies. The young American was as bewildered as if he had been lifted out of a coffin and shaken back to life.

"As soon as I catch my breath I'll thank you," he mumbled. He was more than a little embarrassed to find himself in the presence of such well-dressed and nicely mannered people as Hester Wembridge and her business manager, the suave, sleek, mountain-sized Mr. Jalbeau.

"We're going to call you Stephens," Hester Wembridge said in a friendly manner. "From now on you'll answer to that name."

"Is—is that my real name?"

"We're naming you. Whatever name you used to have, forget it."

"I have," Stephens said, and his strange words made Miss Wembridge smile skeptically. He added, "You've rescued me. I was as good as dead till you came along. I guess you've got the right to name me whatever you want to."

"That's precisely the point, Stephens," said Hester Wembridge with a possessive air. "We have bought your life. It wasn't easy. Never mind how we worked it. You can see for yourself that the Japs fell for it. Do you mind if we call you *Red* Stephens?"

Stephens grinned. "You've bought me."

"All right, Red Stephens. This may all be a little mystifying to you at first, but you'll soon understand it's for the best."

"For the Allies, she means," Jalbeau put in dryly. He was a massive person, the image of cold silence. He spoke with scarcely any movement of his lips,

and his face might have been a wax mask. It was a self-satisfied face that bagged with overfed complacency, if not dissipation. His nose resembled a shoe. His ringed eyes were like thin slits through silver dollars.

"We'll hose you down right away, Red," Jalbeau said.

"I need it. I haven't had a bath since—" Red Stephens finished with a gesture that expressed his indefinite memory. "Whatever this is all about, it was awfully decent of you to pull me out of that hole."

"You'd be flattered if you know how we searched for someone just like you," said Hester Wembridge. "You see, I know this corner of the Pacific. And I often have ideas for helping the military staff. Building these recreation halls isn't the only thing I've done. Though it's probably all you've ever heard my name mentioned for."

Her charming smile was touched with questioning. She waited for Red Stephens to answer. But he only grinned and gathered his torn shirt together to feel more completely dressed in the presence of this handsome woman.

She was thirty-five, perhaps; a decidedly youngish thirty-five, with quick black eyes, and lots of aggressiveness in the thrust of her slightly double chin. Except for this impression of a strong character with hidden powers she might have been something out of a fashion window. She wore her immaculate white suit and pillbox hat with a restrained swagger that would have done justice to a Hollywood actress.

The pillbox hat, however, placed her in the Orient. Its brocaded design, complete with two little pearl-studded elephant ears, doubtless came from pre-Japanese Singapore.

"You see, Red Stephens," she con-

tinued, "we need a man with your face, your hair, your features." She scrutinized him as she talked on, comparing him with the colored photograph from her pocketbook. "We'll have to touch you up a little. We'll add a trifle more red to your hair, and thin your eyebrows a bit. But we can make you do. Of the thousands of men we've looked over in the past week, you're the only one who comes close."

"Thousands?" Red Stephens repeated blankly.

"Thousands," Jalbeau echoed. "We've hopped all over the Pacific Islands. Wembridge is a bear for work. She's wore me down to a shadow."

Red Stephens grinned. Obviously the shadow that was Jalbeau weighed at least two hundred and fifty. Jalbeau, however, gave no hint that his remark was meant for humor. His face remained a wax image.

THE twin motors filled the silence. A brown-skinned slant-eyed pilot, having gained an altitude of twenty-five thousand, had set the plane on the gyro-pilot. Now he returned to the controls, no longer wearing the Japanese uniform, but dressed as any Australian civilian.

The other member of the party, a maid with a French accent, emerged from the rear of the plane with tea things. Red postponed his clean-up in favor of refreshments.

"If I'm Red Stephens," he said presently, "would you mind telling me where Red Stephens is going and what he's supposed to do?"

Jalbeau might not have heard. He went on sipping tea, gazing out the window. Far out on the open sea there was a long horizontal line of black smoke. It was a naval battle, and no doubt Jalbeau wished he were close enough to see it; and yet his thoughts,

so far as Red Stephens could tell, might have been a thousand miles away.

"Will I meet anyone," Red pursued, "who already knows Red Stephens—or is there any such person?"

"You'll meet some native islanders," said Jalbeau. "Red Stephens was an expert at finding his way around. He once had the good luck to lead them out from under a mad volcano. Now they'll eat out of his hands. They and several other island tribes."

"It's a heluva risk for *me* to pull anything like that," said Stephens.

"You've nothing to worry about," Hester Wembridge smiled. "If it's any comfort to you we'll fly down to—to a certain island and give the natives a look at you—that is, after we've fixed you up."

"I don't get it," said Stephens.

"There's a certain military favor to be done," said Miss Wembridge, leaning across the table to speak in confidence. "It's a complicated set-up. On the surface it would seem that no one in the world but one Red Stephens can turn the trick."

"Then we'd better get the real McCoy," the young American said.

"Unfortunately he's dead."

"Then how—"

"You'll take his place. No one will know the difference. No one but Jalbeau and I."

"But how can I fill the bill? If the job calls for some special knowledge—"

"It calls for two things. One, a guide that can pass for Red Stephens. Two, confidence."

"Draw him a picture," Jalbeau cracked, not taking his eyes off the island-dotted ocean.

"I'll tell you more later, Red Stephens." She gave him a confident smile with her eyes, as if to assure him that everything was first of all a matter of trust between friends. "Before we get

back to Australia I'll tell you all about this particular island—known to us in the military circles as 'G'—or do you know?"

"It stands for Greek to me."

A bath, a shave, a haircut, and Red Stephens began to feel like the new man he was. Jalbeau treated his numerous cuts and bruises that testified to some recent but forgotten hand-to-hand engagement. Finally he was fitted out with a light-weight outfit suitable for a trek in the jungle.

As he transferred his pocket things from his old clothes to his new, he found the thick-lensed spectacles that had belonged to Longworth.

Jalbeau's eyes missed nothing.

"You wear glasses?"

"Part of the time." It was the easiest thing to say.

"Red Stephens never had 'em. Let's see how you look in 'em."

Red obediently put them on.

"Not so good," Jalbeau said. "Keep 'em out of sight when anyone's around."

For a moment everything was blurry. Then some objects came clear—four faces—all of them Jalbeau.

Red Stephens gave an amused grunt. He took the spectacles off and put them on again to repeat the comic effect. It was the first funny thing that had happened since he didn't know when. As if this man-mountain Jalbeau was too immense for just one head! He needed four.

At that moment Hester Wembridge appeared at the doorway. Then it was that the strangeness of this quadrupled vision burst full upon Red Stephens.

Hester Wembridge was speaking to him—that is, *one of her faces was speaking to him.*

It was the first of her four faces, the charming one, that spoke. The three other faces wore the chill of cold

steel, and their lips didn't move in the slightest. And yet all four were Hester Wembridge.

CHAPTER III

THE plane landed on a wide sandy beach at the Island of G.

Night was descending. The natives were huddled around their low-burning fires back in the edges of the jungles. War fears and tribal superstitions were combining to create new unknown terrors in the hearts of these primitives.

"What they don't understand, they fear," was the way Jalbeau put it.

Obviously anything that came from beyond the coastal waters of their island could well be feared. And yet they were as brave as any warriors who fought without machines. And they would play their part in the great war of the Pacific.

To Red Stephens' amazement, three or four spokesmen for these savages were on speaking terms with Hester Wembridge. She was truly a power through these regions. Her travels, her money, and her remarkable intelligence had made her known as an important benefactor everywhere, even to these hidden coastal villages.

Red Stephens stood in stiff silence, as he had been instructed to do. The few English-speaking natives were brought up close enough to see him under the flashlight beam. They broke into violent explosions of surprise. It was *Red Stephens.*

"Don't ask him to talk," said Hester Wembridge. "He doesn't often speak these days. This mad war for islands has made him sad and silent."

The tribesmen stood back in awe. Why had Red Stephens come? Was there a catastrophe approaching?

"He has come," said Hester Wem-

bridge, "to be sure you are ready to follow him when danger does come."

"How soon does danger come?" they clamored.

"Be ready," the woman answered. "He will come back to you very soon. He will bring a few white officers. Be ready to follow him and fight for him."

"We will be ready," the tribal spokesmen pledged.

Red Stephens could feel their hero-worshipping eyes follow him all the way back to the plane.

But one native came chasing after them, and just as they were mounting the steps he bounded up with them. He wanted another look at Red Stephens.

"Why?" Jalbeau demanded curtly.

"Because," the native replied, "I think he was not Red Stephens."

"You're crazy."

"Let me see again. Of all the tribe I will know best whether it is Red Stephens."

"Come in," said Jalbeau.

The doors locked and the plane took off. The skeptical tribesman had been added to the list of passengers, much against his will.

But Hester Wembridge saw to it that the tribesman did not get what he wanted. She immediately ordered Red Stephens to close himself in one of the compartments, and there he stayed while the plane roared through the night.

For a time he could hear a little of the arguing voices. But soon after the plane had gained its elevation the talk quieted.

It was then that the voice sounded at his shoulder.

"Well, buddy, have you got her figured out?"

Red Stephens turned. He saw no one. He opened the door of the narrow vertical clothes closet. Empty. He

glanced at the built-in seat beside the window. There was no one behind it.

"*She's playing a clever game, if you ask me.*"

The voice came out of thin air, right at Stephens' shoulder. It was low, almost a whisper. Its mellow quality brought back a picture: those last agonized minutes during the Jap bayonet drill.

"Longworth!"

"*Ssssh. Not too loud. You're supposed to be alone.*"

"Where are you?"

"*Right beside you!*"

"I don't see you."

"*I'm here. I've been right with you since the moment I disappeared.*"

RED STEPHENS stared. He reached out with his hands. He felt nothing. But he saw his own distressed face reflected from the chromium door frame, and he was half convinced he was going mad.

"*Don't let me upset you, buddy. If you can't take it I'll run along. But the troubles are gathering up for a storm. While there's time I think we'd better talk it over. This is the first chance I've had to speak.*"

"Okay, Longworth," Stephens gulped. "I'm probably going nutty, but if it's really you—"

"*It's me, buddy.*" At that moment Longworth materialized before Red Stephens' eyes. The big Englishman mopped his white forehead and his slightly sunburned neck with a handkerchief. "Whew. It's good to get back into solid flesh again . . . Don't look so blank, buddy. Can I help it if that old fakir's magic turned out to be better than I thought?"

Red Stephens removed his spectacles and slowly relaxed his amazed countenance into a grin. "Hell, am I glad to see you! How do you manage it?"

"It's simple when you've been through the mill of magic. More of that later, buddy. I'm famished. You don't happen to have a ham sandwich on you?" Longworth flopped down into the seat limply.

"When did you eat last?"

"In the Jap prison in Singapore—except for that banana I picked up in the jungle. Risky business, turning to flash in the presence of suspicious people. But I managed to eat it and vanish before anyone saw me."

Red Stephens squinted and thrust his fingers through his sandy hair. "Are you telling me you can't eat without becoming visible?"

"Right. But I work up a powerful appetite while I'm invisible. It's more exercise than you'd think. But it's handy. I can cover the ground faster than any airplane."

"How'd you get in this compartment? Did you follow me through the door?"

"I seeped in through the keyhole. I'm nothing but thin air when I'm invisible. And helpless—you've no idea."

"We'd better get you some food, fellow. You look as pale as when the Japs came at you with bayonets." Red Stephens paused, looking Longworth over with more curiosity than ever. Obviously the bayonets had never touched him. They had only plunged through thin air. "Come on."

"You lead the way, buddy. If anyone beside the pilot is still awake I'm not safe around here."

"Why not? Isn't this party on the level?" Red Stephens paused in the open doorway, waiting for the big thoughtful Englishman to answer.

"Maybe on the level," Longworth whispered. "I can't say about that. But it's war, and Hester Wembridge doesn't play war with kid gloves. You remember the native that climbed aboard because he knew you weren't the

real Red Stephens?"

"What about him?"

"They brought him along to get rid of him. And they did. Soon after they got their elevation they went for him."

"Who?"

"Jalbeau and the Japanese pilot. They hoisted him out. He probably never stopped falling till he hit the bottom of the sea . . . All right, maybe I wouldn't fall. Maybe I'd turn invisible and sweep right back into the plane like a breath of fresh air. But I don't fancy getting kicked out. This Hester Wembridge is a clever woman and I don't want to miss the show. Lead on, let's find that ham sandwich."

CHAPTER IV

TWO rounds of sandwiches were finished and a third was begun when Hester Wembridge's footsteps sounded.

"Red Stephens," she greeted softly as she appeared at the dining alcove, "I thought I heard you talking with someone."

"Yes, we—allow me to introduce—"

Red Stephens swallowed hard. Longworth had vanished.

Miss Wembridge gave a strange look, but her eyes softened and she smiled indulgently.

"So you talk to yourself. You even set two places to help you carry on a two way conversation." She patted him gently on the shoulder. "Don't let it worry you, Stephens. You'll be all right after you've time to rest up. Better get back to bed. Have you had any sleep yet?"

"I couldn't sleep," Stephens said gloomily. "I kept thinking about that native who came aboard."

"For goodness sakes' don't worry about him."

"But he says I'm not Red Stephens. What does that do to your scheme?"

"I'll be honest with you, Red." Hester Wembridge sat across from him and eyed him steadily. "We couldn't afford to let him live. His talk would have been too dangerous. He claims he saw the real Stephens killed. So—much as we hated to do it—we dropped him off—to his death."

The young American gave a sigh of relief. It was something to believe that this woman was telling the truth. No one could have doubted the deep sincerity of her purpose.

"You see," she continued, "that native could have queered the whole plan. He'd have spread the rumor that you're an impostor. We couldn't afford to let that happen. Murder is a cruel reward for his keenness. It sickened me to do it. But this is war."

"Couldn't you have brought him on to Australia and dropped him into prison?"

"No. He would have talked. And even our high officers must not know. The slightest loss of confidence will lose this battle. But everything is set. I've already talked with Colonel Moberly by radio-telephone. He knows I've found Red Stephens. At first he wouldn't believe it, because Red Stephens hasn't been seen for so long. But I convinced him I'd done the impossible. And what do you think he called me?"

"Not a liar, I hope."

"An angel. Wasn't that sweet of him?"

"You're a very clever angel," Stephens said, and he was surprised to realize he hadn't said it cynically. This was a remarkable scheme, there was no doubt about it. If he could put his part of it across—but there was his headache.

"You don't have any movies of this fellow Stephens, do you?" he asked. "I ought to know how he walks and talks, and what he's supposed to know."

"You've nothing to worry about," she smiled confidently. "I've thought it through. You've lost your memory—that's fine. I'll explain to the Colonel that you've had a slight accident. You're not quite yourself."

"Then how can I be of any use?"

"Because your jungle instincts are as sharp as ever."

"My jungle instincts! You make me sound like a baboon."

"Frankly, a baboon could put this deal over," Hester Wembridge gurgled, "if those savage natives could be made to believe it was their hero leading them. Better get some sleep. I'll call you at daybreak. Colonel Moberly wants to talk with you by radio-telephone before we set down at Sydney."

"What about?"

"Your reception and a few other surprises." She lifted her arched eyebrows. "You're a hero, Red Stephens. There'll be bands and ticker tape. Prepare for the worst."

STEPHENS unobtrusively slipped a sandwich in his pocket before returning to his compartment.

"Are you here, fellow?"

"*Right at your ear,*" came the whisper out of thin air. "*I heard everything. I still say she's damned clever.*"

"She's cooking up a helluva lot of trouble for me. Bands and ticker tape! I'm beginning to wish the Japs had got me."

"*You'll get by, just like she said, buddy.*"

"A reception and a few other surprises, she says. Now what did she mean by that? What's her game, anyhow?"

"*Winning over the Japs. She's one of the big shots, didn't I tell you?*" The big Englishman became visible, sitting comfortably by the dark window. "As far as I can see, she's risked her neck

to get you, and she'll be cunning enough to win her trick. What are you worrying about?"

"Maybe I ought to trust her, but I don't," said Red Stephens.

"Why not? Oh—you've seen her through the spectacles?"

"That must be what threw me off—that one look. It wasn't so pleasant. Three of her four faces were about as friendly as cold steel . . . Say—what's the dope on those bleary specs?"

Longworth ignored the question. His forehead was wrinkled in thought. "I'll keep an eye on her. Be back soon, buddy."

The big Englishman disappeared.

A few minutes later he was there again, lounging comfortably by the plane's window. He began to munch the sandwich.

"Talk about harmless people," he said. "She's writing in her diary and the French maid is pasting newspaper clippings about her in a scrapbook."

"What did she write? Or were you too mannerly to read it?"

Longworth smiled. "Being invisible, I find it agreeable to dispense with my usual manners occasionally. She wrote, 'Of all things! Colonel Moberly called me an angel!!! Now isn't he a honey?' With three exclamation marks after angel, mind you."

By daybreak the plane was roaring high over Australia. Before anyone mentioned breakfast Red Stephens was called to the radio-telephone.

"Come. Don't keep him waiting," Hester Wembridge warned. "Colonel Moberly is the most punctual man in the world."

The voice came through with a metallic clatter.

"Red Stephens! So they've found you! I didn't think it could be done."

"You're no more surprised than I am," Stephens retorted, gritting his

teeth to get set for a bitter ordeal.

"I have everything planned for you, Stephens. Finding you, is going to save many days and many lives. I can't tell you much now, but when you get here one of your bodyguards will give you your schedule, minute by minute, for the next several crucial hours."

"Minute by minute?" Stephens echoed.

"That's the only way I could work everything in. The parade alone will take three hours, and my speech and yours together will run a full hour."

"But I haven't any—"

"The speech is all written out for you. All that's needed is for you to read it in your own inimitable voice. And by the way, Red, your voice does sound wonderful."

"You've heard it before?"

"Of course. In the newsreels, before you started off on those daring adventures through the unexplored islands. It will be a thrill to see you face to face—and that's what millions of Australians are saying. But we'll hold the parade down to three hours. Then there'll be two hours to look in on the Wembridge Recreation Halls—and there's a treat for you. Two hours of dancing—then the banquet, the speeches, and—"

"Not so fast. You make me dizzy."

"And then comes *the* big surprise. She'll arrive from Melbourne at ten."

"She—who?"

"Ah-ha, Red Stephens, wouldn't you act innocent—as if you didn't know. I'll give you a gentle hint. Her initials are R. L., and she's been waiting for three years to marry you. Everything's all planned, Red. You won't have to worry about a thing."

CHAPTER V

BANDS blared, paper floated down from the office windows, and the

crowds yelled till they were hoarse. Everyone was having an immensely fine time except the sun-tanned young American who was being celebrated.

The breezes blew through his sandy hair as he stood in the rear seat of the official car so gaily decked with red, white, and blue crepe streamers. He cut a handsome figure, simply by riding along, waving his hands, hiding his amazement with a gentle smile.

When he caught sight of his shadow sliding along the pavement at the feet of the crowds he thought he must have resembled some fantastic bird with a blunt beak and a ruffled topknot and one lone flapping wing.

"So this is how it feels to be a hero," he muttered to himself.

"*You're doing all right, buddy,*" came a whispered answer at his ear.

"Yeah? Wait till the speech making starts. I'll choke down like a monkey swallowing a coconut."

"*I'll be with you, buddy. You know what Hester Wembridge says. You don't dare let the people down.*"

"I'm getting weak at the knees," Red Stephens' groan reached the ears of Miss Wembridge. She bade him sit down with her and the colonel, and she promised they would take time out for a lunch before the speeches started.

By the time the fanfare was over Red Stephens had had too much.

"I've got to get out of sight of these crowds," he wailed, weaving groggily. "I'm drunk from all this cheering. It's the toughest deal I've had since that big herd of monkeys in the jungle—"

He stopped short. Hester Wembridge was looking at him with narrowed eyes, but she quickly smiled and went on in her chatty conversational manner.

"So you do remember something of your past, my friend."

"Ah—er—just a bad dream I had once."

"Well, keep right on dreaming you're Red Stephens. That's all that matters now. Do you understand?"

Her final words were edged with a rasping tone that contrasted with her usual soft-spoken manner.

The colonel had lost the trail of the conversation, but Hester Wembridge put him back on. The hero of the day, she explained, wasn't feeling so well. The crowd had worn him down, and he was inclined to be a bit erratic anyway—a hangover from an injury.

"We'll work in an hour's rest in some quiet cafe," the colonel said. "Better disguise yourself, Red, so the people won't know you. If you had some dark glasses—"

"These will do," Red Stephens said, drawing the thick-lensed spectacles from his pocket.

He had seen so many thousand faces in the past four hours of parading that the quadrupling effect of the spectacles had little noticeable effect for the first few minutes. He was still going around in dizzy circles even after the crowds were left behind.

THE colonel, now adorned with four heads, led the way into a cafe. A four-faced head-waiter conducted the party to a secluded table.

The four-faced colonel fell into conversation with four-faced Hester Wembridge, and four-faced Jalbeau sat glumly across from the dizzy young hero. It was highly confusing.

To make matters worse, the invisible Longworth kept whispering over Red's shoulder. "*Food, food! By George, I think I'll join you.*"

"Don't you dare," Red Stephens hissed.

"What's that?" The colonel looked up sharply. He had just mentioned to Hester Wembridge that he would ask the newspapers to refer to her, hence-

forth, as the good angel. The interpolation of "Don't you dare," nettled him.

"Sorry," Red Stephens said in confusion. "I meant that for—for Jalbeau. He doesn't dare pay the checks, I meant."

"Did I say anything about paying the checks?" Jalbeau growled.

"You looked like you wanted to," Red pursued, his hands groping at the table. "Sorry, Jalbeau, we can't let you pay for all thirteen of us. I mean—"

"Thirteen!" the colonel exploded. All four of his faces glared at Stephens. "What do you mean, thirteen?"

"Maybe I miscounted," Red mumbled.

"I never eat at a table of thirteen," the colonel barked.

"*Need another guest, buddy?*" the invisible Longworth whispered. "*I could be persuaded to join you.*"

"Hell, no — don't!" Red blurted aloud.

For a moment his three visible companions stared, but the colonel sagely observed that the jungle had been known to do strange things to people.

"I tell you he's excited from the parade," Hester Wembridge said hastily. She smiled and patted the colonel's hand. "So you think the newspapers would like to refer to me as the—the *what?*"

"The good angel," the colonel said, softening. But in the minutes that followed he kept one or more of his skeptical faces glued on the young American.

Red Stephens suddenly forgot all his dizziness and embarrassment. He was discovering something.

It was like the light of dawn. All at once he was seeing—seeing as he had never seen before.

At first the strangeness of it all made him doubt his senses. But he remembered that first breath-taking glimpse of

Hester Wembridge's four faces — only one of them her usual charming face.

That charming face, he recalled vividly, had been the face at his left. And that was the very face which was smiling at the colonel so prettily at this very moment.

Each of her other faces was occupied in one way or another—one of them glancing at him from time to time very cynically, another focusing a certain cruelty of expression upon anyone and everyone—the waitress, the colonel, or himself.

The left-most face was, in the case of all three of these persons, the face for public consumption. It was Jalbeau's left-most face that maintained the same impenetrable wax mask that Red always saw without his glasses. Among his other faces was one whose eyes continually darted and flashed as if on the lookout for trouble.

It was Hester Wembridge's first face on the left—that face alone—that her admiring public saw. If the colonel could have seen her *second* face, ugh! Could he have called her an angel?

COLONEL MOBERLY'S collection of visages was scarcely less interesting, though there was no sharp contrast between the first face and his second. Red caught the interpretation. There was less difference between the colonel's public personality and his inner self.

One of the colonel's faces, however, showed a depth of feeling—a revelation of pain and worry.

That was proof to Red that through all this day of celebration and frivolity Colonel Moberly was gathering up for the hell that lay ahead. His show of high spirit would end on the stroke of midnight when the perilous expedition took off for the island of G.

Bad news broke up the cafe party.

Reporters stormed in to find Hester Wembridge. The report had just come from Melbourne that the largest Wembridge recreation hall had been blown up by saboteurs. It was a major disaster. Hundreds of United Nations' soldiers had been killed. Would Miss Wembridge make a statement for the press?

"Of course she'll make a statement," Colonel Moberly asserted stoutly while the woman beside him caught her breath.

The tense moment ushered in by this shock caught Red Stephens with his spectacles off. He saw Hester Wembridge's face turn pale, saw her lips quiver. She spoke with deep emotion.

Of course the newspapers would be careful with their handling of such a story. Even though it was a major disaster, nothing must be written that would be bad for the soldiers' morale.

"But certainly you must not repress the facts," she said bravely, and her words brought admiring glances from every newsman.

"A two column story on the front page, perhaps?" one of them suggested.

"Our morale," she repeated fervently. The newsmen felt the strength of her argument. Some of them were considerate enough to promise only a brief story on the second page. After all, they mentioned, this was not the first time that saboteurs had struck at the recreation halls.

"It's the fourth time," one of the reporters snapped, "and I'm for spreading headlines all over the front page. If we can't stop these saboteurs, then we'd better lock up the recreation halls."

The irate reporter stormed out, taking two or three others with him. But the rest stood by, fascinated by Hester Wembridge's apparent courage. She was a woman who could keep her

chin up, no matter what tragedies befell the allies.

"My secretary, Mr. Jalbeau, will prepare my statement for the press within half an hour," she said, managing a brave smile. "Meanwhile I suggest you keep the public attention focused on the name of our young hero, Red Stephens."

The flash cameras meanwhile had done their worst, catching Red and his party from all angles. As soon as the newsmen chased off, Red Stephens donned his spectacles.

Again he was looking upon twelve faces, and what he saw in them he would never forget.

Colonel Moberly's strong features were courage personified. He was doing his utmost to impart strength to Hester Wembridge.

But the hidden expressions of Hester and Jalbeau were unmistakable. They were exchanging sly, satisfied winks. To Red the unspoken conversation couldn't have been any more obvious if they had shouted through loud speakers.

CHAPTER VI

"LONGWORTH, are you there?"
"Present, buddy," came the whisper.

"Did you see what I saw?"

"If you mean Jalbeau, I can't figure him. He didn't even give her a sympathetic look. And that woman is under stress, losing all these halls—"

"You're not seeing straight, Longworth," Red replied. "Take a look through these lenses."

He left the spectacles lying on the table as he followed the party out of the cafe. Glancing backward he saw Longworth appear long enough to pick them up, then vanish.

Longworth rejoined him in visible

form as he taxied to his next appointment. For the present the two of them were alone. It gave them a chance to air their opinions in private.

"Remarkable specs," Longworth said, handing them back to Red. "I'd like to keep them, but most of the time they'd be no good to me. The instant I go invisible they lose their effect. You keep them for me."

"Why the hell don't you stay visible?"

"Buddy, I wish I could. But it's too hard work. Can't stand it more than a few minutes at a time. But don't worry about me. I enjoy getting around. Wouldn't mind this new life a bit if it didn't leave me so helpless. Before I can eat or drink or change my shirt I have to turn into flesh and blood—my kind of flesh and blood. It's not so handy."

"It's damned handy for me to have you sticking around," Red Stephens said. "But the big question of the moment is, did you catch a glimpse of the angel's secret faces?"

"No. She and her elephantine friend Jalbeau were already shoving off in a taxi. I went invisible and climbed in beside them, only to find the specs wouldn't work. I didn't dare turn visible to make them work. But anyhow I got an earful."

"Of grief over the explosion?"

"Anything but grief." The big Englishman's face was white with quiet anger. "You're right, buddy."

"What'd they say?"

"They're rotten, the whole crew of them—Jap pilot, French maid, Jalbeau and the angel. And there must be more to the network, taking care of the sabotage."

"What'd they say?" Red Stephens repeated, breathing pent-up rage.

"They congratulated themselves on timing this Melbourne firecracker to

pop off right when they had a hero under the spotlight. It takes the people's minds off their troubles to have a hero, they said."

"Is that all?"

"Well—" Longworth hesitated. His eyes leveled at Red. "Maybe I'd better watch you through the glasses to see whether you can take it."

"I can take it," Red snapped. "Come on, let's have the worst."

"Okay. They said that the smartest thing they'd got away with was checking off the real Red Stephens. By getting a couple of treacherous natives to murder him, they were sure that the island of G was safe for the Japs."

"Is that so? There'll be another murder—"

"And finally they said that their luckiest break was picking up that dumb cluck to take Red Stephens' place. With him to lead the trek across the island of G, the Japs would trap the native army and cut it down in one fell swoop."

With those words Longworth passed out of sight.

"Hell, fellow, don't leave me!" Red Stephens gasped. "I'm in a devil of a mess. Are you there, Longworth?"

"*Right with you,*" Longworth whispered. "*And I'll stay with you, buddy. You've got to go through with it, no matter what the cost. They're depending on you. And Wembridge is right about that much—you're in, and you don't dare let down your confidence.*"

NEAR the entrance to one of Sydney's army recreation halls, Red Stephens stepped down from the taxi, apparently alone. Before he had thought to put on his spectacles a girl called him by name.

Dozens of soldiers and their girl friends who were clustered around the dance hall entrance turned to give him

a hero's welcome. But a moment later the one particular girl with the jewel-spangled ribbon in her blonde hair cornered him.

Before he could get his guard up she was kissing him.

"Gee, Red, it's sure enough you, isn't it? I thought I'd die waiting."

"Gosh, this is a surprise," Red Stephens gasped, doing his best to smile big enough for the occasion. "You're—you're—"

"Yes, I'm hours early. The colonel told you I wouldn't be in till ten. But I decided to buy my wedding outfit here. And it's a good thing I left Melbourne when I did, or I'd have been caught in that terrible explosion. These Wembridge halls—"

The girl stopped, choking with mixed emotions. But she wasn't going to let tragedy quench her excitement.

"I've got a lot to tell you sometime, Red, but now—gee, I'm all thrills just being with you again. You still love me just the same, don't you? Nothing's happened, has it, Red? You look all confused."

A whisper in Red's ear said, "*Her picture, buddy. I gave it to you in Singapore.*"

"Yes,—er—you, everything's swell." Red mustered his confidence as he brought a snapshot from his pocket. "See, I—"

The girl gave a little shriek of joy. "You're still carrying my picture! I might have known. Gee, Red, I hate to tell you but I haven't got my wedding gown yet, and there's a lot of things to do, and the colonel said he had you on a strict schedule—"

"Minute by minute—"

"But I'll see you right after the banquet, before the speeches. And right afterward we'll be married—and then —"

"And then the colonel and I leave

for the island of G," Red said bitterly. "That's the way when you're a hero."

"We won't talk about that," the girl said. She threw her arms around him for another kiss and leaving him covered with embarrassment she trotted on down the street.

The recreation hall crowds swept him through the entrance and onto the dance floor, for he was too much bedazzled by the swift turn of events to offer any resistance.

"She didn't even tell me her name," he whispered, knowing that the invisible Longworth was at his side.

"*Ruth Lee,*" came Longworth's whisper. "*She used to help out on our programs. She's a swell kid, you lucky dope. Shall I be your best man?*"

Red didn't answer. He was wearing his spectacles again. He had joined the dance and was thoroughly absorbed by the sea of faces floating around him. He began muttering dismally. How deceitful those charming faces were.

"What did you say?" the girl in his arms asked him.

"Nothing . . . Just thinking."

"Tell me."

"Okay, sister. I just said that when a girl smiles at a guy she's dancing with, he oughtn't to get dizzy over it. She's got her eyes on three other guys at the same time."

"That's a hot one," said the girl. "Are you just now getting that figured out?"

Her charm face smiled at him. Her hidden face gave him a scornful look. And one of the other two faces winked at a handsome sailor who was dancing past.

"*Why the scowl?*" Longworth whispered.

"Don't bother me. I'm doing some tall thinking."

"*Big decision to make, buddy?*"

"Damned right," Red snapped. "I'm

to meet Ruth Lee right after the banquet to talk over this wedding business. Do I wear these specs or don't I?"

"*You wear 'em,*" said Longworth wisely.

CHAPTER VII

THE banquet was over. Within fifteen minutes the program of speeches would open.

Fifteen minutes in which to talk things over with the future Mrs. Red Stephens!

Red waited in an alcove just off-stage from the auditorium that was already humming with the noises of a packed house.

"Red, dear, I've been looking everywhere!"

Ruth Lee, looking altogether like a fairy, hurried up to him, again to greet him with kisses.

"*What are you backing away for, sap?*" came the inevitable whisper.

"Get away, fellow," Red muttered. The girl's eyes widened in surprise, but he hastily added, "I didn't mean you, Ruth. I was just talking—er—"

"To whom?"

"To—ah—a little pet I carry in my pocket."

"A pet? Oh, I love pets. What is it?"

"Just a pet—er—you know, a pet turtle. It was kicking around in my shirt pocket."

"Let's see it."

Red reached into his pocket. His fingers came upon his spectacles. He bumbled, "Hmm. It's gone. Got away from me."

"Don't be silly, Red. A turtle couldn't get away that quick."

"It wasn't a turtle. It was a mouse. Yes—a mouse. You wouldn't like it."

"Oh, I love mice. And I love you,

Red Stephens. Gee, I'm so glad you've come. You've no idea how long it's been."

"Yeah."

"Don't look so sober, Red. This is our wedding day. Oooh! Do you wear spectacles now?"

Red Stephens adjusted the glasses over his blinking eyes. "Like 'em?"

"Mmm. Not bad. Makes you look a little too much like a doctor or a professor. Let me try them on."

"No—no. That wouldn't do."

"Please."

"They'd ruin your eyes."

"Just for a minute—"

"Huh-uh."

"Oh, Red, don't be like that . . . What makes you so stubborn? You never used to be. Come on, please. Are you going to start a quarrel right here on our wedding day?"

"I'm not starting it. I'm just saying these specs are bad—that is, they're dangerous."

"Are they dangerous for you?"

"You'd be surprised. Look, Ruth. Look in my eyes and tell me something. Have I changed much?"

He looked from one to the other of her four faces as he asked her pointed questions.

The first face laughed with him and he could have loved that face for the rest of his life without half trying.

But at the extreme right was a babyish face that was still pouting because he hadn't let her try the spectacles.

Next to it was a countenance that was deep with worry and concern. Ruth Lee knew the task that was before him. She knew he was to fly off tonight on a mission that could easily mean death.

When he asked her, point blank, "Are you worried about me," this face quickly nodded.

But it was the first face that an-

swered, laughingly. "Of course not, silly. I know you'll come through like nobody's business. You'll be as safe as that pet turtle in your shirt pocket—or was it a mouse?—or a figment of the imagination?"

The laughing face kept the spirit of fun. But the cynical face next to it—that was the one that kept Red guessing.

THAT face kept mocking him about the imaginary mouse. And other things too. It mocked him about his heroism. It mocked the crowds that cheered him. It expressed the very feeling that he himself felt toward any sham.

Gazing at this face, he repeated his question: Had he changed much in the past three years?

The skeptical countenance seemed to shriek, "Changed, indeed! You aren't Red Stephens. I never saw you before. You're only an imitation of the man I fell in love with—a phony hero."

And yet all the while her laughing face told him he'd changed very little.

"Your hair is a trifle redder and your eyebrows have a new twist. Otherwise you're just the same—except for being a few degrees meaner. But I love you just the same."

And she gave him a kiss to prove it.

"*You've* changed," Red ventured. "You kiss much better than you used to. Had much practice since I saw you last?"

The laughing face chortled, "Red, what a silly question. You're a scream."

Simultaneously the second face made a quick meaningful nod, as if to say, "You're darned right I've had practice—plenty of it."

"Maybe we've both changed a little," Red's mischievous grin vanished in favor of a cool penetrating look. "Peo-

ple aren't statues. They don't stay the same from day to day. They keep changing all their lives. Sometimes we don't even know ourselves from day to day. But if you're willing to marry me—whoever I am—"

He paused, looking from one to another of her facial expressions.

"If you're willing to marry me for what I am—"

Her laughing face was nodding eagerly. The other three faces registered upon him like light waves on a sensitized surface. They were more than he could interpret at the moment. He mentally photographed them for future study.

Five minutes later he took his seat on the speakers' platform. Physically he was a lump of lead. Mentally he was a merry-go-round whirling at a dizzy speed.

She was going to marry him—but why?

Not because she believed he was Red Stephens. She was convinced he was someone else. Regardless of his looks, his ways were not the ways of Red Stephens. He even had the effrontery (her second face had said) to question her faith in him. Red Stephens never would have done that. He had always taken everything on trust.

So, obviously, she was going to marry him for the good of the cause. She had probably told herself it would be a high crime to do anything that would give Colonel Moberly and the public a hint that he was not Red Stephens.

The marriage for her would be a sacrifice, then, and a sham.

But if she should change her mind—or *speak* her mind—the mind that her second face had revealed so plainly—

Red shuddered. He looked out over the packed house. The crowd was

cheering. His elbows froze against his ribs.

Faces—faces—faces!

"I'm sick," he gulped.

"What's wrong?" the colonel snapped.

"Those faces . . . I can't go through with it."

"Sure you can," the colonel said savagely. "Listen to them cheer. They're waiting to hear your voice. Play up to them."

"I can't."

"Why not?"

"Because—because they act as if they really meant it—"

"Of course they mean it."

"You'd think those were their *real* faces—faces you could believe in—"

"Real faces? Man, you are bats in the belfry. You're not yourself." The colonel drew himself up sternly to divest himself of a lecture. "Something's happened to you, Red Stephens. You're sure a different personality from the one they used to write up in the Sunday papers. You've had the reputation of being the most *trusting* soul that ever walked out on the U. S. army—"

"Huh? Walked out?"

"But you're not that today. Oh-oh—on your mark. It's nine on the dot."

COLONEL MOBERLY rose and sailed into his introductory speech to the waiting throng.

Red brought the spectacles up toward his eyes, but his hands quivered so badly that he put them away. "I can't. I can't," he muttered to himself. "After all I've seen of phony faces, I can't."

"Take it easy, buddy." That friendly whisper.

"Easy, hell." Red swallowed and choked. "If I were invisible, I might. Have you stopped to think what's back

of that sea of faces? No—because you don't have a speech to make. But I—*What's he saying?*"

Red broke off with his sticky gurgling to listen to the colonel's introductory remarks: the past history of the now legendary Red Stephens.

"These are the facts about this remarkable man," the colonel was saying, "facts that are familiar to all of us . . ."

Red listened breathlessly. The legend unfolded: the career of a soldier stationed in the Philippines before America had felt any threat of war. A brave and sturdy young man, peculiar in one respect. *He invariably trusted everyone.* He took everything he was told at face value.

That, the colonel said, had been Red Stephens' weakness. It got him into a sharp dispute with his superiors. They tried to teach him that the Japanese warlords could be depended upon to use treachery and lies, and that he and every other soldier must be ready.

But Red Stephens hadn't swallowed it. He didn't wish to have to disbelieve anyone. It had been a matter of principle with him. Then the breach between him and his superiors grew until he argued himself into the position of a conscientious objector.

Eventually he was honorably discharged.

Still he was determined to be useful to the United States army. How? By losing himself in the jungles. By learning the Pacific islands and their peoples.

And so, after sending a promise to his sweetheart that he would marry her if she would come across the Pacific to him, Red Stephens had devoted himself to his chosen task.

And now that the war had come he had already proved the merit of his undertaking. Three times in this first

year of war his talents had touched off military miracles.

Then he had disappeared, not to be seen for weeks. He had, in fact, been given up for lost—until our own Hester Wembridge (here the colonel waxed most eloquent of all), our good angel who has devoted her energies, her brains, and her fortune so generously to the cause of the Allied nations—had the good success to find him. As everyone knew, the colonel said, Hester Wembridge's friendship with certain island natives was the factor that had made his rescue possible.

And now tonight this hero of heroes, who was soon to set forth again on a mission more perilous than any preceding one, would stand before this assembled multitude and deliver an address.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the soldier of the hour."

The colonel bowed graciously and turned to Red Stephens.

Red took his position. The applause was like prolonged thunder.

Red bowed. The bow came easy—so far so good—but bringing his head up required all the strength he could muster, for the blood had chased out of his body, it seemed. As he straightened he found himself looking out over the sea of faces again. Faces, faces!

His knees buckled. The typed speech was waiting to be read. But there was a traffic-jam in his throat.

"I want to faint," he gasped under his breath.

"*Don't do it!*" Longworth's whisper had the snap of a military command. "*Open your mouth and give 'em the works.*"

Red opened his mouth but his voice wouldn't come.

He made three false starts.

Then a whispered, "*Okay, buddy, keep up the jaw work,*" cracked the

deadlock. Red moved his mouth, and the invisible Longworth, reading over his shoulder, shouted the speech into the microphones . . .

The hour's program was over. Before Red knew it, all the dignitaries were slapping him on the back, telling him it was a marvelous job.

"I must say, I'd forgotten what a fine mellow speaking voice you have, Red," said the colonel, shaking his hand.

That inevitable whisper, "*Tell the man thank you.*"

"Thanks," Red Stephens murmured weakly, adding under his breath, "and the same to you, Longworth."

"*I got you over that hump,*" the invisible Englishman admitted. "*But next comes your wedding. I can't handle that for you, buddy. That's up to you.*"

CHAPTER VIII

THE organ was playing a soft prelude. The few hand-picked guests were whispering with an air of expectation. In the semi-darkness outside the chapel door Red Stephens clutched the hand of pretty Ruth Lee.

He didn't want to let that hand go. But he mustered his stubborn determination. This wedding mustn't happen.

It mustn't happen because he—whether he was Red Stephens or someone else—was not going to let this girl make a marriage of sacrifice.

In the past few minutes Longworth had come back to him with another message. The invisible friend had done some more eavesdropping and had picked up a secret conversation between Ruth Lee and—of all persons—Hester Wembridge.

"I'll marry him," Ruth Lee had said, "but you must know, Miss Wembridge,

that he is not the real Red Stephens. He's like a twin brother. Almost Red Stephens, but different. His eyebrows aren't right. His hair is too red. And his confidence in me is completely changed."

"And still you're going to marry him?" Hester Wembridge had smiled. "I don't blame you. I'd like to marry him myself."

"I'm doing it so no one will lose confidence in him. It would be a crime to let all this hero build-up come crashing down. But who is he? Where did you get him? And what will he do when Colonel Moberly takes him into danger, depending on him?"

"I can't answer those questions," Hester Wembridge had replied. "We'll have to wait and trust. Confidence has worked miracles. I'm banking on confidence to win this military expedition."

When Longworth reported this conversation, Red Stephens had retorted bitterly, "She doesn't mean *win*, she means *lose*. But this wedding—are you there, Longworth? Stay with me."

During these exchanges Red was silenced abruptly to discover that Ruth Lee was standing close by him, watching his lips move.

"What are you mumbling about?" she asked.

"Er—just practicing saying, 'I do'."

"I thought I heard you say the name Longworth."

"Oh. Maybe I did. He's a friend. He should have been my best man."

"Why didn't you ask him, Red?"

"Why—ah—he's a delicate fellow. I wouldn't want him to pass out in the middle of the ceremony."

"I used to know a Longworth," Ruth Lee said, growing reminiscent. "I met him when I first started singing at the Wembridge Recreation Halls. I'll bet it's the same Longworth."

"Not likely. I met this one in Singapore."

"Red!" the girl exclaimed. "You never told me you've been to Singapore. How'd you happen to go there?"

"I don't remember," he replied honestly.

"I don't understand you at all, Red Stephens. You say the strangest things. And you never talk about those good times we used to have back in America."

"I'm all foggy, Ruth. I don't think you ought to marry me."

The girl scolded him thoroughly for that remark. Such a silly thing to say, right when they're starting the wedding march.

JUST before they parted to march to the altar with their respective escorts, Ruth ejaculated, "Longworth! Now I know."

"What?"

"Where you got that picture of me. I knew I hadn't given it to you. I couldn't have. It was taken since I came to Australia."

"You must have thought a lot of Longworth, giving him your picture." Red wished he'd had the spectacles on for that remark.

"He's a swell egg, all right. I hope after we're settled down he'll come to visit us."

"Don't worry, he won't even wait till we're settled."

"Gee, that's great to know you know him too," Ruth said. "He's one pal that'll never—let you down."

"You hear that, Longworth?" Red whispered tensely, as soon as he had left Ruth to take his place for the entrance. "Now you don't dare let her down—not at a time like this. For gosh sakes, do something."

"What'll I do?"

"Anything—just so she won't have

to marry me."

"Remember, I can't pick her up and run off with her unless I first turn visible."

"Who said anything about picking her up?" Red snapped. "Keep your hands off her."

"All right, buddy. Don't get sore. You name the medicine and I'll take it."

"Listen, Longworth, there's an electric switch just inside the first entrance. Go back there. Turn visible for a minute, and—"

"I've gotcha, buddy. The air raid alarm."

The ceremony was in progress. Red stood like a statue. The lovely girl stood beside him. Her face was almost as radiant as the scintillating jewels that gleamed in her hair.

"Do you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife?"

Red caught his breath. He glanced about uneasily. Ruth was smiling up at him with all the confidence and happiness that one face could hold. As for her other faces—thank goodness, his spectacles were safe in his pocket.

"Do you take this woman—"

Ruth's smile faded. The silence that followed the repeated question caught the whole chapel in its grip.

Red couldn't stand that silence. He broke into a spell of coughing. Another moment and everything would be all right.

For a third time the question was put to him. He gulped, clutched his throat, made sounds like nothing human.

Ruth nudged him. "If you can't talk," she whispered, "just nod. He'll understand."

Red changed his act. He put his hand to his ear and turned his head from side to side.

"Didn't I—didn't I hear an air raid

alarm?" he mumbled.

"You didn't," Ruth snapped angrily. "Now answer the man. Do you take me or don't you?"

"I—I do," said Red Stephens.

He practically turned to ice. He had done it.

He was still ice a moment later when, vows completed and the ceremony finished, the tardy air-raid alarm clanged. The crowd went scurrying for shelter. But Red Stephens was frozen to the spot.

Mrs. Red Stephens stayed at his side, as a loyal bride should. But she was wearing her second face—the cynical one—and he didn't need his spectacles to see it.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE stroke of midnight Colonel Moberly and his party took off for the island of G. The four small planes carrying his staff and equipment roared into the black sky.

A fifth plane followed.

Shortly before daylight the squadron landed safely on the southern shore of the island.

There, in the edge of the jungled forests, a native village was secluded—the same village Red Stephens had seen two nights previous. On this beach under the blaze of flashlights he had been identified by these native as their hero and friend of months previous—the one and only Red Stephens.

Only one native had contested his identity, and that native had been dropped to the sharks.

"What happened to the fifth plane?" Red asked the colonel.

"It turned back," Moberly answered shortly.

Later in the forenoon, as Red threaded his way over the jungle trails, followed by a line of three thousand

native troops, he found himself conversing with his invisible friend again. Through Longworth he learned that the fifth plane had been that of Hester Wembridge and her party.

"Why was she following us?"

"*I fixed matters up so she'd have to come along,*" said Longworth.

"Why?"

"*To prove to the colonel that she's a traitor.*"

Longworth explained that it had all started when he found himself standing completely visible before the air-raid alarm switch during the wedding. The crowd had come out on the double-quick and he had fallen in with them. And before he could duck out of sight and go invisible, the colonel had engaged him in conversation.

"*I confided in him,*" Longworth whispered. "*It seemed the thing to do. I told him his good angel was a devil.*"

"And he wouldn't believe you?"

"*Exactly. But I told him he could prove it to his own satisfaction. Hester Wembridge had provided the guide for this trek across G. But the guide, I said, was a phony. And Wembridge knew it. She meant him to be a phony. She had even seen to it that natives had murdered the real Red Stephens.*"

"And your proof?"

"*Simply order her to come along and face death with you and the rest. I told the colonel I'd bet him my neck that she wouldn't dare come. My challenge made him sore but he took it, by George, and persuaded her to jump in her plane and follow.*"

"What made her drop out?"

"*She's clever. She followed long enough to pull the wool over his eyes. Then she complained that she was receiving radio communications about the Melbourne disaster. So the colonel phoned back to her that he'd let her off so she could fly back.*"

"Then he still thinks she's on the level?"

"*Yes—and that I'm the phony, not you.*"

"Did you talk with him after she turned back?"

"*I was going to,*" Longworth whispered, "*but when I suddenly appeared, sitting beside him in the plane, he plunged to the floor in a faint. So I faded out.*"

Red Stephens groaned aloud, and Colonel Moberly and three native chiefs trudging along beside him wanted him to stop and take some medicine. It took ten minutes of arguing to convince them he wasn't sick; he often groaned when he was thinking.

Not until they reached a brook and stopped for a drink did he try to resume his clandestine conversation with Longworth.

"I don't know what will come of Hester Wembridge, fellow," he whispered. "She's a tough nut to crack. Her reputation is too sound. Yours, fellow, is too shaky."

Longworth didn't answer.

"As for my own reputation," Red went on, "it's not going to be worth a damn after I get myself lost in the jungles."

No answering whisper.

"But I've a bone to pick with you, old boy," Red said. "The way you let us down on that wedding—Longworth, are you there?"

Silence.

"Longworth! Come back here. You can't let me down like this. I've got to have you. You've got to spy out the danger spots . . . Longworth! . . . Ye gods, what'll I do? . . . What do I know about the jungles?"

THREE thousand friendly native troops were willing to do their part to win the war for the Allied Nations.

They were armed with rifles; their pack animals were loaded with ammunition. As for food and shelter, any part of the island would provide bountifully.

The four planes, carrying all of the colonel's staff and equipment, had flown on ahead, to make sure the coast was clear, and to scout the shores for any signs of trouble.

The colonel himself, however, had chosen to accompany Red Stephens and the troops on foot.

The colonel, as Red realized, was exceedingly ill at ease over the previous day's happenings. Red's every act, from his arrival at Sydney to his abrupt farewell to his new bride, had been indicative of a confused and erratic state of mind.

And still the colonel was so convinced that Red Stephens was the only man for this job that he had not once stopped to reconsider his original plans.

The natives carried the colonel's portable radio, and messages came in from the planes from time to time to keep the marching men fully informed of all findings.

The general destination of the entire movement was the north shore of the hour-glass shaped island. The troops were crossing the narrow mountainous neck of that hour-glass, and the messages assured them that no Japanese landings threatened the northern shore. The danger was that trouble might close in from either the west or the east lobes of the island.

The warlike native troops of these interior areas had already been incited by small Jap scouting parties to make their share of trouble.

The amazing thing to Red Stephens, as he picked his trail northward, was that this line of three thousand natives followed him with such childlike confidence. It was the magic of leadership.

It was the miracle of crashing through old tribal fears and taboos that ordinarily keep these troops on the southern slopes of the divide.

By noon the blue waters were far behind them.

By nightfall they had covered twenty miles to make camp on the farther side of the divide.

In the morning Red Stephens climbed alone to a high observation point to glimpse the farther shores.

"Taboo land." That was the interpretation of the natives' jabber.

"Taboo has new meanings," Moberly said gravely, "now that these warriors have heard of Japanese bombs and sub-guns."

Red Stephens' lips tightened. He said nothing.

"But you and I know," the colonel continued, "that these braves will hurl themselves into the jaws of death, under certain conditions. They'll do it for you, Stephens."

"Let me have a talk with their leaders and scouts," Red Stephens said.

The grim brown faces assembled before him, eyes and teeth gleaming with hero-worship. These were the wielders of power, Stephens knew. They were all he had to depend upon, now. His repeated calls for Longworth had brought no answers.

"Sit down with us, men," Stephens began. The proud chieftains obeyed, joining the circle with Moberly and himself.

"You want to keep your island. We want to help you keep it." These words, Stephens saw, made the right impression. One of the chiefs, anticipating the cost of the trouble that was closing in, blurted his pledge.

"We will die to keep our lands and our villages."

"You are right." Red Stephens rose and straightened tall above the circle of

brown men. He gestured toward the velvety purple of distant jungle hills. "Somewhere out there little parties of the enemy are already waiting. Our air scouts can't see them, for they are hiding, to take us by surprise."

As Red spoke these words, he shook a hard fist into the air. At the same time he unobtrusively brought his spectacles up to his eyes.

"Men. Have no fear. For I, Red Stephens, will not lead you into danger. *I know exactly where the enemy is hiding.*"

His eyes passed carefully over the quadrupled faces. One set of faces caught him, held him by their fascinating revelation. They were the dark faces of Roortog, a native scout.

In a crisp, hard challenge, Stephens followed through with, "Believe me, I know. But none of you know!"

From the faces that this shout evoked, Red Stephens was sure. None of these men did know where the enemy was hiding—none *except Roortog*.

But Roortog's second face was a sure bet. His third and fourth faces were only a trifle worried over Stephens' words. But his second face was aglow with the evil secrets of his inside knowledge.

"We'll move forward at once," said Red Stephens. "Whenever we come near to the enemy I'll warn you."

CHAPTER X

"**H**ERE comes Roortog again," the colonel said in a low voice.

The two white men were hiking along side by side at the head of the long column. It was past noon on this second day of marching, and the high spirited warriors were hopeful that they would reach their destination before nightfall. The deep blue of the wide

ocean eluded them by only a few miles of mountains.

"Roortog has another suggestion," said Red.

"I'm amazed at how many of these trails he knows," the colonel commented, "in spite of all their taboos on this north slope."

"These scouts get around," Red noted.

He and the colonel stopped for a moment of conference with Roortog and the two stout warriors who walked on either side of him.

"What is it this time, Roortog?" Red asked, donning his spectacles.

"The ways divide again," said Roortog. "This one is much shorter and easier."

Red thanked him courteously. "But we'll take the hard trail this time."

The procession moved on.

"I don't understand you," the colonel said, when the two of them were well beyond the hearing of their followers. "You never follow Roortog's suggestions. And yet you have placed two bodyguards over him to make sure no danger befalls him. One would suppose you consider him valuable."

"I do," said Red Stephens, marching ahead confidently. "Beautiful scenery along the way, Colonel. I always enjoy a good mountain hike, don't you?"

Red felt the colonel give him another of those exasperated looks, as if to say, "A fool shall lead them."

It was midafternoon when the first gunfire broke out.

The planes had continually radioed the danger of encounters with enemy snipers. Flying low over the mountaintops they had kept up their search for Japs or Jap-natives. But they had failed to spot any nests of trouble.

Now, several volleys of rifle fire sounded from across the valley.

"That's too far away to be meant for

us," the colonel snapped. "What's more, we're marching under cover."

"We'll keep right on marching," said Red. "We can check our numbers on the march."

Within a few minutes one of the chiefs sent word to the head of the line that a few of his warriors had broken off an hour earlier. They were a small self-reliant band of twenty men and they had taken a notion to follow the stream to avoid the longer trail. The chief had let them go.

"You all know the orders," the colonel retorted. "Those twenty left us at their own risk. If they ran into trouble it's their fault."

"Then we won't go down to rescue them?" the chiefs inquired.

The colonel looked at Red, who, in turn, looked at Roortog, then shook his head.

"Certainly not," the colonel snapped. "We'll hike straight on."

TWO survivors of that band of twenty came pounding up the mountain-side an hour later. Their companions had been picked off without warning. The cluster of enemy snipers—perhaps not more than twelve or fifteen of them—had quickly given up their chase to scurry on over the hills.

"There'll be dozens of nests of them," the colonel said gravely. "Before we make our goal they'll be leaking in on us from all sides."

Red said nothing. Bitterly he sensed the colonel's unspoken suspicions—that he had nothing to say.

"I suppose," the colonel said, fastening his eyes on Red, "that the master of the jungle will see us through."

"Have you any doubts?"

The colonel didn't reply, and he didn't need to, for Red saw his four revealing faces through the spectacles. One pair of eyes expected a nest of ma-

chine guns from every clump of bushes. Another pair exhibited distress at every remark Red made, no longer believing him to be the real Stephens.

And yet it was plain the colonel, for all his doubts, was amazed at Red's good luck in avoiding the danger zones. It happened twice again, before that last most dangerous hour of marching.

Each time a few warriors took their own chances with death in order to follow an easier, more favorable trail, they ran into gunfire.

"By thunder, I'm catching on," the colonel confided to Red. "You're right. Roortog is valuable. Any direction he tells you to go is wrong."

"He's a Jap barometer," Red whispered.

"Um-m." The colonel's eyes narrowed. "So he's had a hand in nesting them."

"Evidently."

"By gum, we'd better watch him. It's all well enough for you to outguess him on trails, but he knows this jungle. We don't."

The implication was plain. Red felt chills sliding around his throat. The colonel meant to do his own guiding from now on. And he would deal with Roortog as he pleased. Red saw him pat the handle of his revolver.

The colonel said. "If Roortog can figure out any way to signal them that we're giving them the slip, they'll shift over and meet us. Say, does Roortog know you suspect him?"

"We'll call him up. You can judge for yourself," said Red.

There was good reason for another conference with the evil-eyed native scout at that particular time. The party had reached a point where one of three directions must be chosen for the last leg of the march.

Should it be the deep blue valley to the left, or the heavily forested stream

on the right? Or should they fight their way over the wide, rugged mountain straight ahead?

"Straight ahead would be the hardest climb," said the colonel. His eyes were scrutinizing the impenetrable face of Roortog. "But it is probably the safest, because it's least accessible."

"What do you say, Roortog?" Red asked.

The native scout, who had been so free with his suggestions, was quick and confident in his reply.

"We should take one of the valley paths."

"Why?"

"Because," Roortog said carefully, "the enemy knows we will expect trouble this close to the coast. The enemy knows we will take the hard path over the mountains, thinking to miss them. So it is on the mountain path that they will wait to kill us. Let us take a low path."

Red nodded. "Now I have heard opinions from all of you. Your advice may be good; it may be bad. Now I must choose . . . Roortog has urged that we take a lower trail."

Through his spectacles he saw that the colonel was shaking all of his secret heads in a vigorous negative. And through his spectacles he also saw the hidden faces of Roortog.

"This time we'll follow Roortog's advice," Red said. "We'll pick an easy trail—a valley—"

Red broke off. *Which* valley? That was the question the traitor's face hadn't answered. But the answer would be there. Already Red was certain that one valley was safe and the other was death. But *which*?

BEFORE Red could speak, one of the chiefs gave a rebellious bark.

"An easy trail—a valley—into a death trap!"

Other leaders began to clamor. Take Roortog's advice? Not they! Roortog had proved himself wrong every time. His words would have led them to enemy nests.

The sullen growl of chiefs and scouts became a wave of superstitious rage.

Everyone began talking at once. To both Red and the colonel it was a shock and a revelation. All this sullen rebellion had been gathering in silence. Every wrong admonition from Roortog had rooted in these superstitious minds.

The spectacles proved that it was a wave of near violence. But, fortunately or otherwise, it was slow to focus directly upon Roortog himself. The chiefs and scouts fell to arguing with each other, demanding to know which tribe Roortog served. Some warriors summoned the two big bodyguards whom Red had placed on either side of the evil-eyed scout, to know why he should have their protection.

In the confusion Roortog saw his chance. He broke and ran.

Red saw a desperate light in his four pairs of eyes as he glanced back. Then he bounded over a gulley and out of sight.

Red pocketed the spectacles and sprang into action. He leaped down over the dip and came up running. The scout was yards ahead of him, ducking, dodging, chasing pell-mell for the thickest patch of woods on the slope.

Light flicked over Red's face like sunshine through a picket fence. He raced with every ounce of speed he could muster. Ahead of him the scout sprawled over a root, rolled down the sharp grade, and crashed into a tree.

Red's feet thudded like an engine. In another moment he would be on the dirty traitor, pounding the daylights out of him—

He pounced. He caught his victim by the ankle—almost. His hand

snapped off. Roortog was up again, thrashing over the thickets like a deer.

But the steepening mountainside brought the chase to a hard, panting stop. There was Roortog, glaring back like a trapped tiger, creeping along an almost impassable slope. Loose rocks slipped under his feet.

For a few yards Red tried to follow.

"Come on, Red Stephens," Roortog called back in a scared, angry taunt. "Get me if you can."

"You can go to the devil," Red flung back at him. He paused, breathing aloud. He could hear the voices of the chiefs and their restless troops from somewhere up on the mountainside. The colonel was shouting at them, restoring order. The few scouts who had started to join the chase for Roortog had been called back.

That was all to the good. And yet Red knew instinctively that the air was charged with dynamite. Those superstitious natives were on the brink of a panic of fear. Already some of their vagrant members had met death.

Red thought of the good angel as she would gloat to hear that the venture on G had come to a sorry end. He thought of that poker-faced demon, Jalbeau, and those shifting, whirling eyes of his secret face. The angel and Jalbeau would pretend to regret this island's tragedy, of course; they and their ring of saboteurs would go on with their bold schemes, flaunting their reputations for patriotism in order to divert attention from their treachery.

Red thought of Ruth Lee—or did she call herself Mrs. Red Stephens, even though he had left her with the promise of an annulment.

She had made no answer to that offer. She had only whispered, "Courage, Red. You'll come through." That had been her good-bye, with no spectacles to complicate its simplicity.

With these thoughts Red broke out of his moment of indecision. He crept ahead.

THE traitorous scout glanced back to see him coming. Only thirty yards lay between them—thirty yards of perilous grade. Roortog made three swift strides ahead. But the rocks rolled under his feet, and he grunted and gasped with desperation as he flung himself at a bit of shrubbery.

He glared back at Red with savage defiance.

"Why don't you shoot me, Red Stephens? You've got a gun."

"You know why I don't shoot you, you damned traitor," Red shouted back at him. "You'll get it, all right. But first you're gonna tell me what I want to know—just like you've been telling me!"

Red grabbed for his spectacles.

The evil-eyed scout took it to be a pass at the gun. In a swift rush he fought his way up the devil's slide of rocks.

"Which lower trail?" Red yelled at him.

But Roortog never turned his head. His swift footed bound took him within a few feet of a ridge that he could have anchored to in safety. But at the last second of his climb the rock jumped from under his feet and he went rolling down—down—everlastingly down, carrying a deluge of loose stones with him.

That was when the landslide began. All at once the narrow section of mountainside was slipping away like marbles on a tilted plate.

Red jammed the spectacles into his pocket and ran like a fleet-footed deer. He not only ran, he vaulted, rolled, and tumbled. Anything to cut back over the trail to the trees. But every split second he was slipping down, and the rocks were chasing past him until he

couldn't leap over them fast enough.

An upward glance told him that a whole wall of death was storming down past him. Trees were snapping and crashing back of him. In another instant he would surely be rolled under the flood of roaring death.

Then something struck him across the head and he dived headlong.

His eyes were closed. He was lying close against the jagged earth. The echoes of the roaring landslide were fading away. The silence was strangely pleasant.

Then there were sounds of voices only a short distance from him. The colonel and some of the natives were calling.

His eyes opened. He gazed gratefully at the outcropping of table-sized rock that had stood like a Gibraltar to ward off the sudden death he had been promised.

He arose, rubbing his head, drinking in a deep restoring breath of the familiar jungle air. In a flash everything came back to him. Not only his lost battle with Roortog—but *everything*.

The colonel was first to reach him.

"Thank God you're alive," the colonel breathed. "Those native fools still believe in you. And as long as they *think* you know what you're doing, there's a chance—"

"I know what I'm doing!" Red Stephens snapped.

"You know which of the three trails is least dangerous?"

"Three trails!" Red snorted. "From this point I can pick three dozen trails, and we won't bump into an enemy nest on any of them. Get your army into motion and follow me."

CHAPTER XI

RED was put aboard the first plane returning to Australia. He had

big news to take with him. Since the successful occupation of the northern coast of G was, for the present, a military secret, the news couldn't be radioed. But Red carried the report signed by Colonel Moberly.

As matters worked out, the official document reached Sydney well ahead of the plane. That miracle might mean a headache for the historians in years to come. It would seem impossible. But to Red Stephens, who knew the special talents of his invisible friend Longworth, it was no trick at all.

The only difficulty in the process was that of keeping Longworth's appearance a secret. Once he materialized before Red's eyes he willingly accepted the message.

"Don't worry about my delivering it into the right hands, buddy," Longworth said. "And stop your ribbing me about neglecting you on your island jaunt. Maybe I had good reason to be absent. My magic entails certain other responsibilities besides you. Have you ever stopped to think of that?"

Red nodded. "I'm a trusting soul. But I ought to put on my specs and see if your other responsibilities have to do with Ruth Lee Stephens."

"You needn't. I've been on the trail of one Hester Wembridge and her crew." The big Englishman's thoughtful face betrayed a keen relish of his own mischief. "In fact I've already delivered an official message for her—one she didn't intend to issue to the public until you and the native army had lost your game."

"What did she report about us?"

"Nothing good. She and Jalbeau had worked out a whole communique of how the sniping parties had knocked you out. They would have turned it over to the press, tomorrow or the next day, as if from one of their island news

sources. But I gave them quicker service."

"You mean you stole it?" Red asked.

"Before their signatures were dry. They turned their backs, I became visible, snatched the papers, and vanished. A few minutes later I deposited them where they would do the most good. It's a sensational news story. The angel's in hot water trying to explain how it came through so quick."

"It's going to be more sensational when Moberly's report comes in."

"The sooner the better," said Longworth, suddenly vanishing. *"I'll see you in Sydney."*

"Wait, Longworth. I've a personal message—"

"Tell Mrs. Red Stephens you want to see her? Okay, buddy."

A FEW hours later when Red landed at Sydney he was disturbed by the uncomfortable feeling that he would soon be engulfed by blaring bands and cheering crowds.

He was immensely relieved to hear Longworth's reassuring whisper as he was taxiing out of the airport.

"Whither away so fast, buddy?"

"To find Ruth Lee. She'll be having a nervous breakdown, with all these conflicting news reports. I've got to see her, whether she wants to see me or not. And I don't want any parades stopping me."

Longworth became visible in the seat beside him. "No bands yet, buddy." The big cool Englishman waved a negative gesture. "The headlines are still screaming your defeat. Any report to the contrary would give undue aid and comfort to the enemy; until the colonel and the native army get established and an air base is set up, there'll be no public report."

"Okay—just so the military staff knows the truth. You delivered the

colonel's dispatch?"

"Yes, but the officials said they'd believe it was genuine when they heard it direct from the lips of the colonel—or you."

Red grunted with displeasure. "That damned angel's got an awful grip on them. It's a question whether you and I can break it, fellow."

"Have your cab driver take us straight to headquarters," Longworth advised. "You'll have no trouble getting in."

Arriving a few minutes later, Red thoughtlessly paid the driver for two passengers—one visible, the other present in spirit only—and hastily made his way to the high officials.

It took less than ten minutes for him to spill a story as convincing as dynamite, and fully as explosive. Before he knew it he was on his way to the offices of Hester Wembridge, accompanied by high ranking officials and a motorcycle squad of guards.

The lobby of the Wembridge offices was deserted except for the presence of one girl—Ruth Lee Stephens. To the first guard who entered she explained that she had been waiting for more than half an hour to see Hester Wembridge, but that, strange to say, the office had been cleared shortly after she arrived.

"The secretary, Mr. Jalbeau, went back to tell her I was—" the girl saw Red Stephens and she broke off with a surprised gurgle. "Oh, Red! You're alive—you're—"

Red started toward her. Impulsively she had advanced toward him; but on the next instant she began backing away. Her quick change of mind was so puzzling that Red reached for his spectacles. However, his stronger impulse was to take her in his arms, for he could see that she had been crying.

"I've got to talk with you, Ruth," he murmured. "I've things to tell you—"

"Later, Stephens," one of the officers cracked. "Don't tell anybody anything till we get this Wembridge business cleared up. It's time we know who can be trusted and who can't."

The officer in charge proceeded to bark a few questions at Ruth, who knew nothing as to where Miss Wembridge had gone, or when.

"I heard her voice when I first came," Ruth said.

"And why did you come?"

"To have a personal talk with her."

"What about?"

"About—about Red—and where she found him—and why she was sure he'd been killed on this new expedition. And then there were other things I wanted to ask her—though maybe I'm mistaken—"

"Go on."

"I just wanted to ask her whether she's on the level. Somehow I've had a hunch in these recent months I've been working for her—"

"You're all right," the officer cracked. "It's time we all had a hunch. From the looks of things, our good angel is the highpowerdest fifth columnist that ever hit Australia . . . What's back in the offices, men?"

The guards who had searched the further rooms came up with a farewell note signed by Jalbeau, conveying Hester Wembridge's last minute instructions to her office employees. It announced that she was leaving for a short vacation, destination not to be disclosed. Her finances, the note stated, would be found in good order; and perhaps she would make another donation to some worthy cause if the public appreciation justified it. This she would decide upon her return.

Meantime, the note stated, she wished no communications whatever; hence she was leaving no forwarding address.

"It's a walkout to save her neck!" The officer in charge led the way back to the street. "Load in, men. We'll phone headquarters on the way."

THE official car burned up the streets, and Red doubted whether Longworth was along, from the way the back seat bounced. The two-way radio crackled with messages back and forth, to headquarters, to the airports, to the coast defenses.

Halfway to the field where Hester Wembridge was known to keep her plane, they learned that the plane was there in its usual place. Yes, the party had been there—two men, two women—Hester Wembridge's usual party.

Had they attempted to take off?

Indeed they had. But a few minutes earlier, someone had observed, a prowler had walked up to the plane and smashed its propellor and motor with a scrap of steel.

Who was this saboteur?

No one knew. The big fellow had mysteriously disappeared before the airport guards could close in on him . . . But that didn't help answer the real question—what had happened to Wembridge and her assistants?

The answer that mattered came from one of the coast defense stations. A party of four? Yes, such a party was at this very moment in the act of *speeding to their death in a stolen mosquito boat. They had killed the boat's guard. Now they were hellbent—*

"What do you mean, to their death?" the officer snapped.

Red strained to catch the answer. Every man in the speeding car was leaning forward tensely, alert for the words that would clarify this impending fate.

The answer didn't come in words. It came from the boom of a French 75, concealed somewhere on the cliff above

the shore.

The speeding car drew to a stop on the shore drive. The echoes of the big gun pounded Red's ears in a series of rocky clatterings.

Then he and the officers saw it happen. Far out on the blue there was a little splash of water and steel. Where there had been a moving speck there was suddenly only the big rolling sea.

"That's our angel," the officer muttered. It was a square hit. There wouldn't even be a handful of wreckage . . .

Red sauntered down the coast drive to a stone seat in a bit of grassy parkway.

"Longworth?"

No answer. Red sat moodily, thinking how ironical that he was still alive. Because of Hester Wembridge. Because her murderers had failed her. Because she had happened upon the Jap bayonet drill to rescue him—to double for himself. Because she had been confident that this double would lead thousands to their death.

And now her game of playing angel had slipped and crashed.

Red's back was toward the shore drive; he seemed isolated from the world, sitting here looking out upon the waves where, a moment ago, life had so suddenly been transformed into nothingness.

"Longworth?"

"At your service, buddy."

"Our angel has fallen."

"Did you wish her dead?"

"It's the only answer," Red muttered. "She flew over to the wrong side of the fence too often."

"I've clipped her wings," Longworth said. "The others are dead. But she's floating—" The Englishman appeared sitting alongside Red, looking as wise as ever, though perhaps a little tired.

"You mean she's out there in the

water, struggling—"

"She's floating in thin air, buddy. I fixed it for her. Just a crazy impulse to try the old fakir's magic on my own. So the instant the bullet struck, I did it. Don't ask me how."

"The devil take your *how*," Red snapped. "What'll she be up to, floating around invisible, with all her fifth column ambitions?"

Longworth's eyes glinted with interest. "I've got the upper hand, buddy. And I can promise you she'll get a good taste of hell on earth before she passes on. You see, the people are going to know about her. The people can't be fooled by any fifth columnist for long. And when the news breaks—"

"She'll hear the people talk."

"Exactly. They'll give her hell . . . Hell for a fallen angel . . . By the way, buddy, you've never told me about losing your memory. Was she back of that, too?"

Longworth's questions started Red on a chain of reminiscences, and as he talked he closed his eyes . . . Yes, everything was clear now. Yes, Wembridge, who had known him only by reputation, had paid a couple of natives to kill him . . . They had chased him off a cliff and thought him dead . . . After that fall had come the hours and days of dizziness . . . He had fought his way to a coast and stolen a Jap plane, and evidently had flown to Singapore, not knowing where he was going . . . He had awakened to find himself about to be executed—and then the spectacles—

"So you talk to yourself," said a pretty feminine voice close at his ear. His eyes snapped open. Ruth was sitting beside him. He stared. Longworth had disappeared. At the nearest drive was a cab that had brought the girl.

"Do go on with your monologue,"

she smiled. "I was enjoying every word of it—even if you didn't mention thinking about me."

"I've done plenty of thinking about you, Ruth." He gazed at her shining eyes. There were still signs of her recent crying, but the laughter had come back again. A face he could love always! A face—



(Concluded from page 7)

IN case we neglected to do it, we have an announcement to make. Your favorite magazine—this one of course!—has increased its size to 240 pages each month. (Or have you noticed?) This means you get—to get down to statistics—115,000 words of fiction, an average of ten stories per issue (sometimes eight, sometimes twelve or thirteen), approximately 35,000 words of other features. Literally, you are getting two magazines in one, and if you care to draw the analogy, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES is comparable to a bi-weekly magazine. But you've been such good readers, you deserve a reward!

WHILE we were writing this, we discovered that William P. McGivern can't count. His 20,000 word cover story turned out to be 15,000 words, and we found an embarrassing hole right in the middle of our book. So we had to dig into our files for a short story to fill the bill. But we came up with a peach. "The Scarlet Rollers" by Stanton A. Coblenz. Fortunately also, this story had an illustration just finished for it, by Ned Hadley. So that makes eleven stories in this month's contents!

WE heard of a hotel clerk who almost swore off reading fantasy one night. He began to count his receipts, and when he checked, he found he had \$50.00 less than his first count. Feverishly he turned over the stack of bills and counted again. Ah, correct! But being a cautious chap, he counted again. \$50.00 short! Many times he counted, each time turning the stack. And each time he got the same disturbing results. Then he found the reason—a \$100.00 bill with \$50.00 printed on the other side!

Here's how it happened! The Treasury Department was preparing an order of \$50.00 and \$100.00 bills for the Kansas City National Bank.

The printing of the bills was performed in two operations. One plate would print the obverse of a \$50.00 bill on the top of the sheet while it printed

He started to reach for his glasses.

But it seemed he needed both his arms to hold her tightly, so he laid the specs on the arm of the stone bench, out of her sight.

And while they kissed, only Red could see that someone appeared for a moment and then disappeared—and the spectacles were gone.

the obverse of a \$100.00 bill on the bottom of the sheet. After this operation, the sheets were laid aside to dry and then run through a plate that printed the reverse of a \$50.00 bill on the top of the sheet and the reverse of a \$100.00 bill on the bottom of the sheet. However, one sheet somehow was turned around between printing and thus contained two misprinted bills—one with a \$50.00 obverse and a \$100.00 reverse while the other had a \$100.00 obverse and a \$50.00 reverse. All this happened in 1890.

THE simple procedure of waxing the cut end of a stalk of bananas with paraffin is the recent discovery which will do away with the expensive spoilage of the fruit.

Rotting in bananas which spreads from the cut stalk is one of the most serious causes of spoilage. Molds grow where the stalk is cut and cause rot. If the mold growth in the cut stalk could be prevented, this form of spoilage would be eliminated. This same form of rot is also found in melons and pineapples.

Cut stalks of bananas were treated with a number of substances to see whether mold growth could be prevented. Fungicides proved to be practically useless. Borax, formaldehyde, corrosive sublimate, potassium permanganate and copper sulfate, all of which usually destroy fungi, were not able to prevent bananas from decaying. However, excellent results were obtained with substances which block the surface of the cut stalk mechanically. Thus there was no subsequent rotting if the banana ends were dipped in melted paraffin wax. Vaseline smeared over the banana ends also considerably reduced rotting.

HERE'S a fantastic true story: W. C. Allee and N. Collias, two zoologists at the University of Chicago, have reported successes in making a bully out of a "weak sister".

Their experiments showed that hens vary in their pugnacious instincts from those who peck at every other hen without any opposition, to those who peck at and are pecked at, to the very meek hens who are always pecked at, but never have the courage to peck back. They took the meekest hen they could find and injected a small amount of testosterone, the male sex hormone, into her veins. The transformation was

amazing! The former "weak sister" was going about and pecking at every hen she could locate. Just to do the thing up right, she even crowed a few times.

This experiment was tried many times with complete success on hens and may soon be tried on other animals.

All that can be said is that when and if the experiment is a success when tried on humans, the day of man's dominance over women will be a thing of the past. So, what do you say, men—let's keep the secret to ourselves!

THE record of being the first woman to ascend in a balloon was made by Madame Tibe, a citizen of Lyons, France. This epoch-making event occurred on June 4, 1784, before the royal family of France and their royal guest, the King of Sweden.

Madame Tibe decided to make this dangerous ascent when she learned that Fleurant, a French painter and air enthusiast, had been unsuccessful in his attempts to secure a male companion for his flight. Fleurant was won over to this wild scheme and he and Madame Tibe rose to glory in their good ship, Gastave, a Montgolfiere balloon.

EVER since World War I, entomologists of the United States Department of Agriculture have been studying why a wound infested with maggots will heal more quickly and far better than wounds containing no maggots. A few years ago, after much research, they finally discovered that the maggots secrete a substance, now called allantoin, as they move through the infection.

The newest method to heal a deep infection is to apply a solution of allantoin which the department has found exists in both insects and plants. This new manner of treatment is cleaner and more effective than using the maggots themselves.

WHILE working in his laboratory one morning, Wöhler, a German chemist produced some urea by accident. This was the first case of any organic substance ever being made synthetically in a laboratory. The year was 1828. And the event was probably a cast-shadow of Hitler's "new order" of artificial Aryans to come!

ANOTHER proof of the high standard of living enjoyed by Americans, is the fact that the per capita consumption of electricity in the United States is more than four times the per capita consumption for the rest of the world. That fact might point the way toward an answer to war-time power problems.

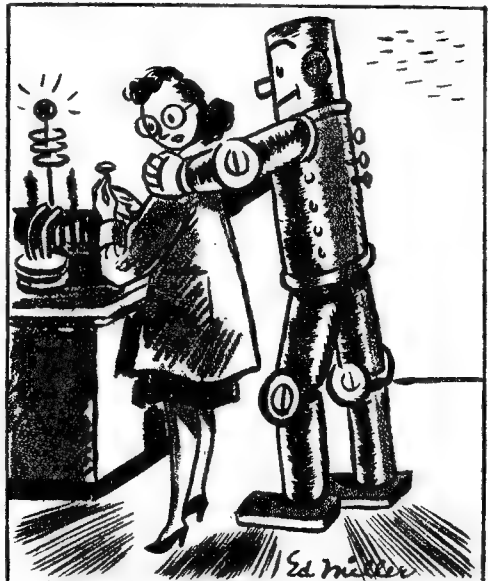
FRESH off the press is a new issue of our gigantic new companion magazine *Mammoth Detective*. You had better get a copy of it, because we have a book here that'll make your eyes pop out—and besides, it has the best stories

you ever read in any detective magazine before. If you doubt that, just take a gander at the following sentences and find out. Take for instance the authors whose reputation you already know from reading their stories in this magazine.

ALEXANDER BLADE, for instance. He has the cover story, "Case of the Living Mummy." Then there's Dwight V. Swain with "Through Murder's Eyes," an unusual detective mystery with a western background. William P. McGivern does a story on his popular character, Geoffery O'Neil, called "Death Lays the Odds." John York Cabot covers the private detective as he has never been covered before in a fact article called "Private Sleuths—At -Your Command." David Wright O'Brien reveals the Chicago Homicide Squad in a brilliant "by-night" story of their actual activities. Henry Gade does "Diamonds for Defense," a story about industrial diamonds in our war effort. Robert Leslie Bellem also carries the war into fiction with "Hot Skins" (tires to you).

AS FOR top-notch names in the detective field, a complete Anthony Trent novel (79,000 words!) by Wyndham Martyn, leads off the issue with a bang. Harold Channing Wire does "One Border Night." George Armin Shaftel and G. T. Fleming-Roberts each contribute one of their finest works of mystery fiction. Howard Browne, now of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES' editorial staff, repeats his initial success with his skip tracer character, Wilbur Peddie in a new mystery.

Add a whole slew of interesting features and departments to this, and you ought to get the hint. That's our boy scout deed for today!—*Rap*.



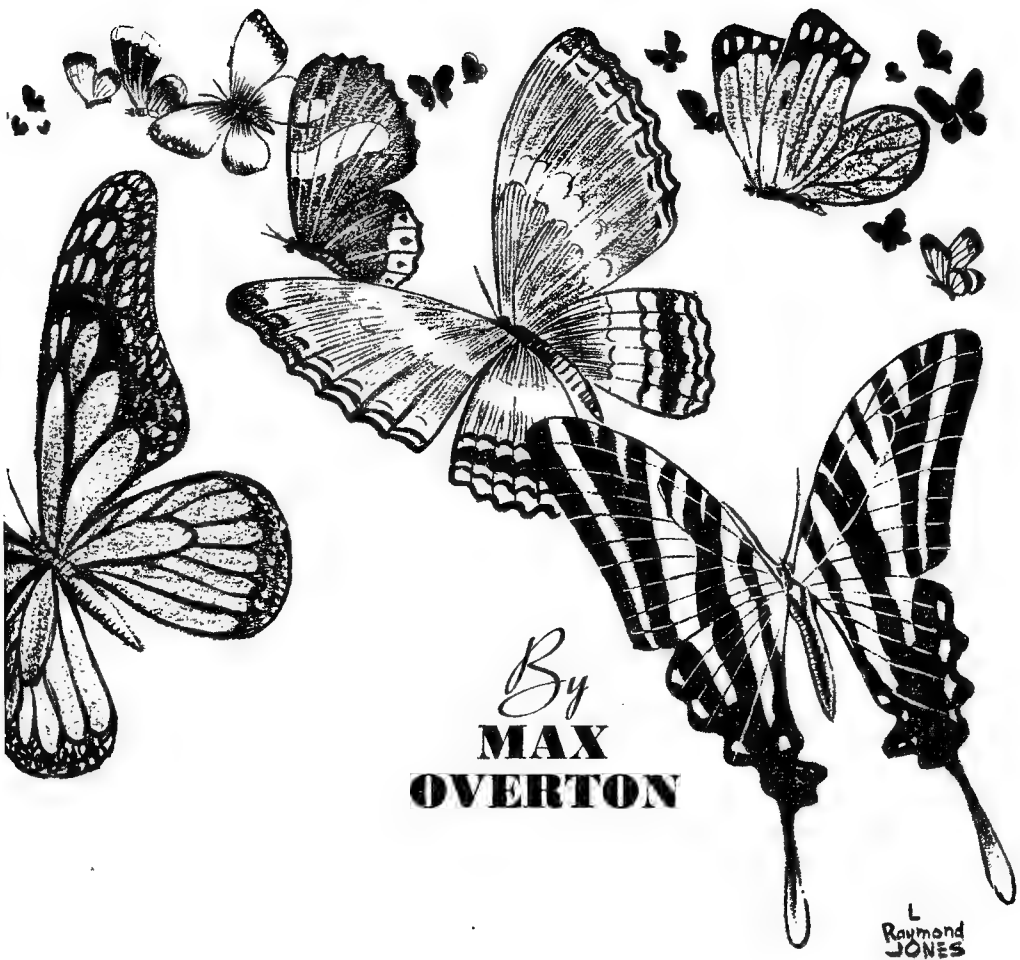
"Oh, I forgot, he CAN'T control himself!"

The DEADLY YAPPERS

They were very lovely, these luminous
winged moths, but those who dared
love in their caves met a terrorizing fate

Eerie "yapping" noises beat about
their ears as the luminous things
swept forward with chilling purpose





By
**MAX
OVERTON**

VACATIONING along the sea-coast I happened into Greencliff on a day of excitement. The legend of the purple yappers was in the air!

"Two fresh skeletons in the cavern!" I overheard someone say. I cocked my ears. Everyone on the street was talking about it.

"Two again! Who were they?"

"Nobody knows. Vacationers from up the coast, I reckon."

"Of course the local authorities won't do anything. They're afraid to go near the place."

"And why shouldn't they be, considerin' what the yappers feed on?"

The curious superstition was that the deadly yappers fed on evil thoughts!

I had heard that story a hundred times. The old sailor, Libinger, who had once taken me for a day's fishing along the reefs below Greencliff, believed it implicitly.

The yappers were said to be shaped like butterflies, but they were more deadly than any plague of locusts. I can't give you their scientific classification, for our attempt to capture a specimen was ill-fated, as I shall relate presently. At any rate they were luminous purple insects of an unknown variety, and were never seen except in the dark, when their double wings

would float about like illuminated dominoes swimming through the blackness.

I had learned about yappers from Libinger. On our aforementioned excursion he had talked of them from the minute we pushed off in our row-boat.

"On evil thoughts they feeds," he had repeated, grunting at the oar. "And I'm thinkin' it's well fed they be."

"But why does anyone ever go near them?"

He spat at a wave and squinted his eyes. "No one does 'cept drifters, pullin' along this coast fer the first time, who don't know. Them an' the lovers."

"The lovers?" I asked in surprise.

"Sure. They're the ones that's really pie fer the yappers. Them that's tender and juicy. God only knows where they come from. Vacationers, I reckon. Skimmin' down the coast lookin' fer a trystin' place, an' here's this nice secluded cavern, yawnin' at 'em. So they ties up and goes ashore, not knowin' that these devilish yappers is hoverin' over 'em invisible, waitin' and workin' up their appetites fer the moment that they gits carried away by sinful thoughts."

Old Libinger was utterly serious, so I had him take me around the cape to see the place. It was a three hours' row, and might have been worth it if we had tied up and taken a look at the skeletons. But Libinger wouldn't hear of it. So all that I saw was the cavern, as big as a schooner, that opened a little above the water's edge.

"Those yappers may be over us right this minute—" he had insisted that they were invisible in the daylight—"and I'm not fer takin' no chances."

"I don't hear them yapping," I said.

"They don't yap except when they're about to go for you. Then they yelp like a flock of geese. I heard 'em one night and I kin tell you I rowed like a

demon to git away. Never let up till I got clean around past the Mad Hermit's. Then a few days later I heard what happened."

"Another skeleton?"

"Two of 'em."

AS WE pushed on back around the promontory, I turned these weird notions over in my mind. "Strange no one's taken the trouble to exterminate these pests," I said, but the old fisherman shook his head. He was sure anyone who ventured into the cavern and glimpsed a pair of skeletons locked in each other's arms would turn into yapper bait on the spot.

"No body but what has sinful thoughts sometimes," he said, and he was so deadly in earnest that it was almost comical, "and I'm not havin' mine in reach of them deadly beasts."

No use trying to shake him from his phobia, so I turned to other subjects. I asked about the Mad Hermit, and he rowed me in close to shore so I could glimpse that curiosity.

The Mad Hermit proved to be a heap of bones and rags sitting on a stone in front of a small cave that penetrated the rugged rocks of the promontory. We were close enough to see his large white eyes following us as we rowed by. Libinger hailed him but he didn't move.

"Pleasant guy," I said. "Good fisherman?"

"Never knew him to fish," Libinger muttered. "I reckon he lives on what the sea tosses up to him."

The yappers were still gnawing at my mind, I guess, for I said, "Funny the yappers have never got *him*."

Libinger jerked his thumb over his head, saying, "They're clean on t'other side of the cape. I don't reckon they ever fly around—or over the top either—though if they ever did, they'd find

a good fat meal."

Libinger said it seriously and I looked at him, puzzled. "I thought he was just a pile of skin and bones," I said.

"Your eyes are bad," said the fisherman, scowling at me. "He's fat as a drum."

Well, others told me similar things about the yappers, so I wasn't entirely in the dark when, during my present chance visit to Greencliff, I heard echoes of more yapper trouble.

I wondered if something couldn't be done, wondered if *I* had the nerve to try to do something. Then, strolling into the post office, I saw an eccentric looking old gentleman stamping about on a peg leg before the bulletin board. This grizzled, bespectacled person was tacking up a card.

The curious onlookers ogled. He finished, turned, and tapped off on his wooden leg. They closed in on the bulletin board. The message glared at them in red ink. It read:

THE YAPPERS MUST GO. WILL YOU VOLUNTEER TO HELP EXTINGUISH THEM? IF SO, MEET AT SAMPSON'S BOAT HOUSE FRIDAY NOON. I WILL LEAD YOU. HARRISON K. MERIWETHER, AGENT OF THE GOVERNOR.

This announcement had the right tone. I was gratified. The excited citizenry seemed ready to rally, were already counting the hours till Friday noon, and generating plans to wipe out this menace. I had no thought but to join them.

As the hour approached, I wended my way to Sampson's boat house.

CHAPTER II

The Party Goes Forth

THE day was blustery, and the tepid winds promised a storm. Between

the weather and the superstition, only a handful of volunteers appeared.

It was just as well. A small party was preferable, I thought, and I said so to Harrison K. Meriwether, who pranced about nervously on his peg leg.

"Just so no more drop out," he said somewhat bitterly. It was a blow to his pride that the whole town had not turned out. He was a coddled hero of the governor's, a man of many past glories, but now beyond his prime. No doubt the governor had set him on this case to give him something to do, assuming it would be a wild goose chase. Few people outside the realm of Greencliff took the legend seriously.

The sea was rough. Meriwether decided we should not chance the boats, so we set forth on foot.

Our by-road skirted the shore line for half a mile, then wound inland, around a cove and up a ravine, then back to the sea. We passed a small board sign, "Beware Yappers."

By now, we trailed in groups of twos and threes, Meriwether doing his best to hold the party together. He was not successful. Our numbers dwindled from the moment the walk began.

Now, three husky lads at the end of the procession stopped to throw rocks at the signboard and as we rounded the bend they turned back.

There were only six of us left: the two men in the lead, wearing khaki for the first time and wearing themselves out like two eager boys on their first hike; a young lad of fifteen named Monty, who strolled along by himself, cracking the trees and rocks with his bean shooter and seldom missing; the one girl who stayed with the party, Lucia Fontaine, with whom I struck up an acquaintance; the hobbling Meriwether, who now brought up the end of the line; and myself.

Lucia Fontaine was an attractive

thing. She was just out of school, a few years younger than I, the first girl whose appeal for me had grown rather than diminished in the first hour of acquaintance. I kept saying to myself, here at last is the unbelievable—the sort of girl I thought came only in dreams.

She fitted in well with the rugged scenery we were passing. Her black hair floated in graceful waves as the rising gale blew against us. Her green sweater and slacks, her full blown orange blouse made her a colorful figure.

There was determination in her smooth even features. She was on a mission for her brother, a zoologist. He had heard of the yappers and was half convinced that a new rare species might have come into existence out of some curious circumstance.

Lucia was to capture a specimen to take back to him.

"Aren't you afraid?" I asked her.

"Why should I be?" she laughed in her musical voice. "Of course I don't believe in the legend. But even if I did, I would have no reason to be afraid. I haven't any evil thoughts." She laughed again.

Suddenly a sharp crash of thunder brought our party to a halt.

The two men in the lead were bluffed out.

"This is no time to be getting farther from shelter," one of them said. "We're turning back before it storms."

Our gallant leader with the wooden leg was too fagged to dissuade them. He made a feeble protest while they marched off.

"We should have started earlier in the day," I mentioned, noting how the black clouds were gathering. Then I saw that Meriwether was looking at me contemptuously, as if I had exceeded my authority. He grew arrogant. Now,

that his force had dwindled to Monty, Lucia, and myself—all of whom he knew would stick and see this thing through—he began to strut his old importance. A couple of sandwiches had restored his energy.

Food did us all good and we moved along again.

The skies grew darker, and rain began to spatter.

We looked about for a sheltered nook to duck into while the first torrent poured down, and lo! right ahead of us in the crook of the bend, was a cave. Now I knew where we were, for I had seen that cave before. It was the Mad Hermit's! Moreover, there sat the old boy himself, a lean, gaunt mass of skin and bones heaped on the big rock outside the cave entrance, watching us with his big white eyes!

CHAPTER III

The Mad Hermit's Cave

IT WOULD not be pleasant for me to describe in much detail the repulsive feelings that came over us as we approached this miserable sight. Whether it was his actual appearance or his bestial manner that caused the chills to creep through our spines, I do not know; but I could see from the pallor that came over Lucia that she was experiencing a wave of terror. Her shuddering body was close at my side as we stopped before the Mad Hermit.

Now, that we were faced with him, I suddenly realized that I knew nothing about him—his name, his language, his manner of life, or why he was called the *Mad Hermit*. When I had seen him before, I had been at a comfortable distance and it had not occurred to me to inquire whether he was really mad.

His eyes were not actually white. They were yellow, upon closer inspec-

tion, surrounded by massive white eyeballs protruding from their sockets. Those eyes turned outward, and it was impossible to tell whether either of them was seeing us. They blinked slowly like an owl's. Wiry hair was scattered over his sallow greenish face and bony head. The wrinkled skin gathered on his hard cheek bones, and his black lips spread to reveal three big jagged teeth.

This we took to be his smile. Meriwether addressed him, told him we wanted shelter from the storm. He made a slight nod toward his cave which we took to be his welcome. We went in.

There he continued to sit as the clouds poured their flood down over him. I called to him to come in with us, but he didn't seem to hear. His dark body remained silhouetted against the splashing sea. Now and then a flare of lightning would illuminate the pock marks that covered his loose copper skin, and the rotting threads of the blowing, tattered garment about his waist.

It was an unpleasant half hour, and as soon as the crest of the storm had passed, and the skies settled down to a slow, drizzling rain, three of us were anxious to get on. The lad, Monty, was impetuous and ready for adventure. Lucia and I agreed we had come too far to turn back. But Meriwether's humor had grown steadily worse. He was sick of the whole deal and he blamed us for his troubles. He cursed me for all his bad judgments, and raved because we hadn't made better time.

We let him rant, for we all knew that we had lost at least an hour holding back for him, and doubtless he was nearly exhausted from a strain he never should have undertaken.

As we picked up to move on, there was just enough daylight left for a

glimpse of the map Meriwether drew from his pocket. It showed the promontory around which we were circling. There was the Mad Hermit's cave on one side, the cavern of the yappers on the other.

THERE was a curious fact I had not known before. The cavern of the yappers, according to this map, was directly opposite the Mad Hermit's cave where we now rested. Only a very narrow neck of this mountainous promontory divided the two points. And the caves led in toward each other. But the mass of wall that divided them would necessitate our hiking another two or three miles around the end of the point and back.

The curiousness of this arrangement caused me to flash my light around the rear of the hermit's dwelling to gauge its depth. The glimpse told me nothing, for the room tapered off into three or four obscure corners that my light could not penetrate.

So I assumed there was no way through. My next thought was that perhaps we could clamber over the top of this mountainous neck of land; but as we emerged from the cave I saw in a glance that it would be impractical to make such a suggestion. The rocks were high and rugged, and it would be hard enough for Meriwether to get around by the footpath.

"How far around to the yappers?" Meriwether shouted to the Mad Hermit, still sitting in the rain. The old scarecrow's eyes blinked a little faster. To my surprise, he spoke an answer.

"Two mile." His voice was tight and squeaky. He made a slight nod in the direction of our course. Meriwether thanked him. He spoke again. "Look out for 'em. They feeds on evil."

His eyes were actually glittering now, and one of them was certainly on Lucia.

She clung to me fearfully, and I led her away, out of this sickening presence. A cackling laugh echoed after us.

"Did you see the way he looked at me?" she asked in a quaking voice, as soon as we were out of hearing. She was still trembling, and I must confess the gruesome sight which had unnerved her was not easy to forget. As we hiked along I talked glibly of many things, but those glittering yellow eyes kept burning into my mind.

"Do you think he liked it when we went into his cave?" Lucia asked. "He looked positively wild when you shot your flashlight around."

"Did he?" That was something I hadn't noticed.

"He acted as if he were about to leap off his perch. And then all at once he tamed down and began batting his eyes again and twisting his lips and showing his big ugly teeth. Ugh!"

Impulsively my arm went around her waist as I tried to reassure her. I knew what was in her mind, now. Sooner or later we would be returning past his cave, and already she was beginning to dread it. So was I. As darkness came over us, our outlook for the night's adventure grew more ghastly.

SOMETHING made this night different from anything in my previous experience—different in the most fearful way; and I knew it was more than the blackening skies and the sea, and terror waiting somewhere around the promontory. It was my realization that whatever gruesome adventure befell me must also befall this beautiful girl whom I had just found.

For her, everything mattered. I wonder now, as I look back, that I did not seize her by the hand and flee back to Greenciff to safety, for every step of our progress was haunted by more terrifying premonitions of evil.

Before we rounded the point of the cape, Harrison K. Meriwether dropped by the wayside. His body was aching sorely, he said, and he would have to rest. He was willing for us to go ahead.

"Wait for me at the cavern," he said. "I'll come as soon as I'm able."

"We'll kill off the yappers before you get there," I boasted, "but you can come and make an official count of the skeletons if you want to."

He protested. He didn't want us to kill any yappers till he got there. Stubborn old cuss. He wanted to commandeer the slaughter. Besides, he had brought some torches that he wanted to use. I offered to take over his torches and do the dirty work. Save him the trouble.

"No, no! I've got to see this through myself. I'm not hanging back and letting the rest of you horn in on the governor's re—"

He stopped short, then tried to cover up what he had said, but the cat was out of the bag. Somewhere there was a reward waiting for the extermination of the yappers, and Harrison K. Meriwether expected to cop it.

Well, he deserved it at that, I thought, tramping all over this rocky sea coast on a wooden leg.

Certainly the reward didn't interest either Lucia or me. We each had our private motives for going ahead: hers, to capture a rare specimen; mine, to protect her.

But there was Monty, game little scout. His eyes blazed bright at Meriwether's tongue-slip. A reward sounded good to him, all right, and he was on his way toward earning a share of it.

Consequently, as we rounded the cape, Monty chuckled to hear Meriwether's voice, still calling at us out of the blackness against the slushing of the sea, ordering us to do nothing until he came.

In due time the three of us came to a stop before a ghostly black opening in the side of the promontory which we knew to be the dreaded cavern of the purple yappers.

CHAPTER IV

The Hungry Yappers

THE soft lavender lightning playing over the skies showed us the way into the cavern, but we were not quick to enter. We stood huddled close together, talking in low tones. The rain had ceased. Our clothes were soaked. We were chilled to the marrow. But most of our chill was not from the rain, for the air was still warm.

"I wonder how soon old Meriwether will catch up with us," I said. "I'm ready to go on in, myself—"

"So am I," chimed in Monty, spirited as ever. The lad was plainly eager for a sight of the skeletons he had heard so much about.

"But the instant we enter we may have a battle on our hands, Monty," I warned. "Those yappers may not like us. If they come our way we'll be forced to start swinging paddles at them, regardless of Meriwether's orders."

"Then you don't take any stock in their hunger for evil thoughts and nothing else?" the boy asked.

"Certainly not. Do you?"

Lucia and Monty both said no, very decisively. Thank goodness, we were free from superstition.

"It's beyond me," Lucia said, "how these insects can kill a person anyway. That's another part of the legend that bothers me. But I've come prepared."

She was drawing some glittery sheets from her haversack which proved to be cellophane hoods. A very ingenious precaution. We hooded ourselves snug-

ly and put on gloves. Now, that our bodies were completely covered, we crowded toward the entrance of the cavern more confidently.

We were keenly curious for a glimpse of the little purple devils. We held back only long enough to halloo for Meriwether, and getting no response, agreed to make the break.

We edged under the blackness of overhanging crags, single file. Lucia was following me, Monty in the rear.

"Listen!" I hissed.

There was a fluty musical tone echoing from those black depths, a velvety "Yeep, yeep, yeeple, yeeple, yeeple—"

Lucia caught my hand.

"They're yapping," I whispered. "Crying for food!"

We were breathing excitedly.

"Yeeple, yeeple, yeeple—" now louder as if coming toward us, now softer from a distance. We had seen nothing but jagged stones and wet shrubbery under the intermittent streaks of lightning.

But the next bright glare from the skies penetrated every crevice in the hollow room before us, and what a sight! A graveyard of unburied dead! Glistening white human skeletons strewn about in grotesque positions. Lucia stifled a gasp. Monty's startled curse was uttered half in delight. The lightning was gone but the white figures still hung in the blackness.

The thunder echoed away and the weird yelping filled the cavern again.

"Where are they?" Monty whispered. "I thought they were supposed to be luminous."

HIS answer came from the yappers themselves, for suddenly, out of a crevice high in the wall, a dazzling purple stream poured forth. It was like a serpent of light, weaving through the

blackness, sweeping down over the skeletons, yelping like little starved dogs.

But it was not a solid stream. It was hundreds—yes, thousands of floating purple spots, luminous wings, none of them as large as a half dollar, melted together in a glowing chain of purple fire. Now, they massed together on a single skeleton, turning it into a body of shimmering color.

Abruptly they rose and floated to the next bodies—a pair of skeletons, their bones intertwined. Then to the next, and the next.

We waited breathless, our weapons ready. As they finished their round of skeletons they circled about the cavern, throwing their ghastly lavender glow over the walls.

They swept down toward us, hesitated momentarily as if to light; then, as we drew our paddles, they yapped away again.

"God's sakes," Monty grunted, "I never saw anything like that before."

"The strangest sight I ever saw," Lucia breathed, as the purple host began another tour of the skeletons.

"Bird, beast, or fish?" I asked.

"A rare variety of locust, I think," Lucia answered. "My brother will be amazed." She was holding a small movie camera, catching some slow-motion shots. "Strange about these skeletons," she added, growing more perplexed. "The yappers don't seem at all inclined to attack *us*."

We stepped over the jagged pathway to the out-of-doors again, shouted for Meriwether, but got no response.

"He must have taken off his wooden leg for a rest," Monty cracked. "I wish to gosh he'd get here. I'm anxious to plow into these purple demons with a torch and see what happens."

It was hard to be patient, especially after Meriwether had been so disagree-

able, but I argued that we had just as well wait an hour or so, for the night was yet young. We loitered back along the footpath a hundred yards to a protected spot of ground under a cliff, and scraped together enough dry wood to build a fire.

We ate, and toasted our feet, dried our clothes, and warmed our spirits. It was curious, the change that had come over us. As if the dreaded menace of the cavern had already been conquered. As if these weird, yelping creatures were no longer anything to be afraid of. We pondered the matter. Their very attractive beauty, it seemed, had softened our feelings toward them. Lucia and I had no more desire to destroy them than one has to crush a lovely flower. And yet it was plain, from their rounds of the skeletons, that they had been guilty of feasting on human flesh.

Our fire burned low. The restless slapping of waves grew fainter. The storm rumbled away. Our talk ran out. Still Meriwether did not come.

"Musta gone back to the Mad Hermit's," Monty said carelessly.

Lucia nestled closer in my arms, and I knew her memory of the yellow eyes must have caused the momentary tremble that passed over her body.

"I don't see how that creature exists," she said with a shudder. "There wasn't a thing in his cave, no food, no fishing nets, no weapons—nothing except that big rusty knife."

"I didn't see it," I said.

"Neither did I," said Monty.

Silence fell again. It was a restless silence. The recollection of the mad man somewhere on the other side of this hill was disturbing, especially to this lovely, sensitive person huddled close beside me.

At length our impatience for Meriwether reached a limit. It was nearly midnight.

"One of us better go back and look for him," I said.

"I'll go," said Monty, grand little fellow. He picked up his beanshooter. "I figure you folks can take care of yourselves without me."

"I think so," I laughed.

"We'll be at the cavern," Lucia said. "I might as well get my specimens."

So Monty whistled his way back toward the point of the cape and we kicked out the fire and strolled in the other direction. Again the cavern yawned before us, black and silent.

CHAPTER V

Meriwether's Wooden Leg

WE DONNED our cellophane hoods and went in.

There was very little yapping now. The chorus of "yeep, yeep, yeep" had lost all its sharpness; it was no more than a low, contented, musical murmuring—strangely charming.

The glowing purple spots had ceased their agitation and were settled in a complacent mass over what we assumed to be one of the skeletons. Cunning, attractive little things. Gradually they began to stream upward toward the crevice in the wall from which they had originally appeared. But not all at once. The great host of them continued to hover over the object on the floor, from which a thin stream was constantly rising toward the crevice, and another thin stream constantly descending.

It was a beautiful sight. Lucia said it looked like a two-way water fall into a pool of magic light; and it was hard for us to remember that each of these pairs of purple spots flowing through the blackness was a deadly enemy of man.

I took the glass jar which Lucia had

brought, and picking my steps to the illuminated wall, I had no trouble in capturing a few of the specimens as they emerged from the crevice.

We settled back in a secluded nook near the cavern entrance to await the arrival of Monty and Meriwether. Nothing more to do until they came. What could be keeping them?

Lucia was very happy. She had her specimens and her motion pictures, the two goals of her coming. She rested contentedly. I think she even forgot her fear of the Mad Hermit as she yielded to my eager embrace.

"What a strange night," she murmured.

What a strange night! A few hours earlier I could not have dreamed that such an entrancing moment as this was drawing near. The soft rippling of the waves sounded from the misty rocks below us. The fresh, rain washed air wafted through our corner of the cavern. The masses of white along the floor were only dull blurs in the velvety blackness. The only light that played over the lovely feminine features beneath my gaze came from that magic pool of purple across the cavern floor.

The spell of beauty was upon us, but it was more than that. It was the first blush of new-found love, and our awakened passions knew no bounds. While the little purple killers murmured contentedly a few feet away, we dared to forget them for the moment. I had shed my own cellophane hood; now I removed Lucia's gently, and my lips sought hers.

I was inflamed. I was finding life anew, a world of rapture I had scarcely dared to dream of, and I thanked the strange stars that had brought Lucia to me.

Then, as we clung in close embrace, breathing together, my thoughts reverted to the legend. What a fantastic

thing that was, and yet—!

No, I swore to myself. It could never have touched us! Even if it *had* been true, even though the deadly yappers had chosen to feast upon evil, Lucia and I could never have been harmed in such a moment as this! Our love was the real, the beautiful, the truest and strongest passion of life!

And then I wondered how many of these skeletons about us had been lovers who had believed that same thing about themselves—who knew the legend and believed it, but were too sure that their own rapturous moments could not be evil.

"LUCIA," I whispered, "you don't believe in the legend, do you?"

"No, dear," she answered, and again her lips lifted to mine.

It must have been two hours or more past midnight when Monty at last returned to us. He was alone and I sensed that he was troubled. The complacent, chirping yappers were not disturbed by his entrance. They were still streaming to and from the crevice in the wall. I had ceased to wonder at their strange, industrious behavior.

"Did you find Meriwether?" I asked.

"No," said Monty. "I guess he's gone."

There was an ominous tone in his voice. I questioned him. He had trailed the footpath back to the Mad Hermit's, calling all the way without an answer. Now he breathed excitedly as he related his encounter with the Mad Hermit.

"There was just enough light that I could see his shadowy form coming down toward me. I was scared. I asked him if he had seen Meriwether—"

"Yes, go on."

"At first he didn't answer, except to give a hideous laugh. He kept coming closer and I kept backing up, asking

him the same question. Then he told me he had seen two men come along in a boat and pretty soon three men went back, so he knew one of us had hailed a boat ride back home."

We breathed with relief. "All right," I said, "if that's the case—"

"But I don't think it is," Monty was still breathing hard. "I think he was lying."

"Why?"

"Because of the funny way he acted. He kept coming upon me, closer and closer and—you're right, lady," the boy blurted, "he does have a knife!"

"Oh!" Lucia gasped.

"And it was bloody!"

"What?" I snapped.

"I saw it—in the lightning—as plain as I'm seeing those yappers this minute. It was hanging right above me in his long bony hand. Believe me, I made tracks. I spilled over some rocks, and here he was, coming toward me again. I let fly with my bean shooter. He let out an awful yowl. By that time I was on my feet again and I had a club in my hand. Just in case I couldn't outrun him."

"But you did!"

"Yeah, it was easy, once I got back on the path. But the club—that's what I started to tell you about." He hesitated.

"Well, what about it?" I demanded.

"I brought it back with me. Thought you might want to see it."

I snapped the flashlight on. The object he was holding out to us was Meriwether's wooden leg!

"Does that mean anything to you? That, and Meriwether gone, and the Mad Hermit running wild with a bloody knife?" The boy's lips were white. No doubt we were all three as pallid as those skeletons surrounding us, as these terrifying thoughts struck home. For a moment we were silent.

"What do you think he's done with the body, Monty?" Lucia's voice trembled finally.

"That's what I've been asking myself all the way back," said Monty through tight lips. "I can't figure it out. It doesn't make sense. The Mad Hermit's got nothing to gain by murdering people, so far as I can see. It's got me going."

HE WAS no more exasperated than we. A heavy silence fell again. There were no sounds from the sea. Nothing but the contented yeeple, yeeple, yeeple from across the big open room—as if these busy little purple beauties were sending out their soft music to distract us from the awful reality we were facing. But we would not be lulled. The facts were coming out into the open at last.

"Did either of you notice that map Meriwether had?" I asked.

"What about it?" said Monty.

"It showed this cavern to be right over the ridge from the Mad Hermit's—at the narrowest width of the cape. These two caves run in toward each other. Why couldn't there be a connecting passage?"

Monty grunted an oath. "I get it."

"Then the yappers didn't kill these people!" Lucia exclaimed, "but simply fed on them after the Mad Hermit put them here!"

"That sounds like a safe hunch to me," I said, "if we can prove this grave yard is connected with his cave."

There was a tense silence as I shot the flashlight along the rear walls of the cavern. We were wearing our cellophane hoods now, so we didn't mind disturbing the traffic of the yappers. It was curious to see them turn invisible under the beam of light as it shot past the crevice.

None of the black shadowed corners

appeared to be openings on casual examination.

"Let's take a look at the skeletons," Monty suggested. "If they're really the Hermit's, the bones should show some scars from his knife."

It was gruesome business, surveying these bleak human relics one by one under the sickly yellow glow of the flashlight. The three of us stalked along past them, one after another, catching a hint of knife scars here and there, trying not to notice their grotesque positions or their occasional signs of freshness. Finally we came to the object over which the deadly yappers had been hovering for the past two or three hours.

Lucia uttered a little outcry before my light turned on this object. Realization was a moment ahead of the senses.

Under the dim glow the pool of yappers went transparent, and our eyes beheld the form of a naked man, his features partially obliterated, his flesh partly consumed. But one thing was unmistakable—his right leg ended at the knee.

CHAPTER VI

The Hermit at Dawn

BEFORE I had the presence of mind to swing the light away from this terrifying scene, Monty bent down to the object and put the wooden leg back in place.

Whether he did it out of a sense of returning lost property, a sense of reverence, or a morbid sense of humor, or whether he was so shocked by the spectacle that he did not know what he was doing, I do not know.

At any rate I flashed off the light at once, and the three of us at once slunk back toward the out-of-doors, speech-

less with horror. Now, looking back at the pool of purple dots, and the chains of purple dots floating up and down between the pool and the crevice, we were mortified to recall that this same sight had entranced us with its magic beauty only a few minutes ago.

Without a word we moved down the bank to the water's edge, breathing deeply of the fresh air, trying to rid ourselves of the sickening image that burned upon our eyes.

Stars were visible, now. Mists hung over the water. The next hour would bring the gray of approaching dawn. We talked again, in low tones.

"So, while we toasted our toes waiting for Meriwether, the Mad Hermit was placing him in the museum," I said. "He evidently murders for sport, and hides his crimes by dragging the bodies to the cave of the yappers. How—I don't know. But it's plain that's what he's done with Meriwether. As soon as we get back to town we'll send a boat out."

In this much, the three of us agreed. But as to our immediate course of action, we were thinking in three different directions.

I was in favor of finding the Mad Hermit without further delay, before he found us—

Monty's one purpose was to exterminate the yappers. He remembered Meriwether's words about a reward.

Lucia saw reason in both of these plans, but she pointed out that there was still a baffling puzzle here that her scientist brother would wish her to solve.

"Before we exterminate the yappers, shouldn't we learn what it is they are doing? Why are they consuming that body so ravenously? Where are they storing their food when they pass through the crevice in the wall? If we can first answer that question, then

I'm ready to see them destroyed."

Monty and I gallantly acceded to her wishes. None of us, of course, anticipated that we were bargaining for an even more gruesome climax to our night's discoveries. But once we had agreed to strike out for the answer to this scientific mystery, we shut the horror of Meriwether out of our minds and went to work.

In the cavern I held Monty up on my shoulders and he put the dying flashlight to the crevice in the wall, but he could see nothing. The darkened room told us the yappers were working as industriously as ever.

"We've got to get to the other side," I declared. "There's a chance we'll find their depository if we do."

We surveyed the remote corners of the cavern again without results.

"Then it's over the top we go," said Monty.

"And keep eyes sharp for the Hermit," I warned. I patted my pockets to be sure the essentials were there in case of an emergency—my revolver and some light rope.

HALF an hour later the three of us had crossed the rocky backbone of the promontory and were making our way down on the other side—the Mad Hermit's side of the cape. It was slow travelling, picking our way through the dark over this precipitous mountain ridge. Suddenly a gasp from Lucia froze us in our tracks.

"The yappers!" she uttered.

There they were in a brilliant purple heap not twenty feet below us, their illumination casting a soft glow on the waters a few feet farther down, on the hermit's side of the promontory.

We crept a little closer. Now, we could see the double stream that led to this purple mound—yappers going and coming. The slight buzz near my ear

told me that Lucia was catching pictures of this end of the procession.

"What are they doing?" I asked. "Depositing their food right out in the open?"

"I don't understand it," said Lucia, "unless—"

"Unless what?" I asked.

"Unless it might be a very peculiar instance of symbiosis."

I turned the word over in my mind and was as puzzled as ever. I had a hazy idea of balanced aquariums in which one form of life helped to support another form, to the mutual benefit of both—or certain kinds of trees that support clinging vines which in turn give them life. But I couldn't see how these ideas helped to explain why purple yappers should carry their food through a tunnel of rock to deposit it by the seashore on the other side.

Monty emitted an exclamation. "Look! That mound of yappers is in the shape of a man!"

Lucia answered coolly. "*It is a man. It's the Mad Hermit.*"

Monty was beside himself with excitement. "But why—?"

"They're feeding him. That's the way he lives," Lucia replied.

"You mean—?"

"On the transfusions of nourishment the yappers bring him." Her words were authoritative. The ghastly evidence was before us. Still, the very thought took us a staggering blow. A thousand questions leaped into our minds. Curiously we found some of the answers already there—the barren cave with no signs of food or fishing nets or hunting weapons—the blotched, pock-marked skin that covered the hermit's hideous body—the steady stream of yappers passing back and forth—and, in my own experience, Libinger's mysterious statement that the Mad Hermit was fat as a drum!

We whispered some of our questions to Lucia and stood amazed as she told us some of the fantastic-sounding cases of symbiosis that are a matter of scientific record.

Monty brought us back once more to the task at hand—to exterminate.

"Do you think a torch would attract them or repel them?" I asked.

Once more, Lucia's scientific knowledge came to the rescue. In her opinion, insects of this type were probably as combustible as so many capsules of explosive gas. Monty was eager to start back to the other side.

We reasoned that as soon as their food supply had run out they would still hover over the bones. That would be the chance to catch them all in a body.

Already the stream of purple leading to the hermit was thinning down; and now as the gray of dawn spread across the skies, rendering the yappers nearly invisible, we caught on film the awesome picture of the Mad Hermit—a changed creature—a huge bulbous mountain of swollen flesh sitting motionless below us, apparently half asleep.

WE CREPT away silently. With the aid of growing daylight we were soon again over the mountain top and back to the dreaded cavern. The horror of what we had seen clung in our minds. It was plain to us that the Mad Hermit had somehow stumbled upon a hideous means of subsistence unlike that of any other human being.

So that was why he killed; that was why he could live in a barren cove by the sea where the dead fish washed up: to let the feasting yappers pass their nourishment on to him. These skeletons, then, had somehow fallen victim to his knife; and after he had killed them and placed them in the yappers'

cavern, the deadly insects had done the rest. And all the while the superstition about the yappers had protected him in his ghastly business.

We paused before the cavern entrance. We told ourselves that we had looked upon the Mad Hermit for the last time in our lives. Never, we thought, would that repulsive bestial face ever confront us again. For now we would apply the torch to the yappers and be on our way. We would report our findings to the authorities and they could deal with the mad murderer and his trophies as they saw fit.

We steeled ourselves to look upon the remains of the unfortunate Meriwether once more. The little purple beasts had made swift work of him. Already he was scarcely more than a barren skeleton.

Even as we entered, I was still half-consciously gripped by the feeling that there *had* to be a passage somewhere in this cavern that would let the hermit through from the other side. We had failed to find it, but the presence of Meriwether's skeleton, and the others—

The yappers began to scramble for places over the surfaces of the bone. Their food was nearly gone. The outgoing stream of light ceased; the incoming stream was coming to an end. Though the blackness of the cave was fading to dull gray, the floor still blazed with purple light. A pool of thousands of illuminated dominoes. Here was our chance to catch them all together.

Before Monty lit the torch I made sure that Lucia still had the glass jar of specimens.

Then Monty marched in toward the pool of purple light with a burning stick.

"Yeeple, yeeple, yeep, yeep, yeeple!"

The ravenous creatures set up a sharp chorus as the last of the food vanished. Louder and louder, like survivors from a famine clamoring to be fed.

Strange illusion, I thought, the way that yapping was echoing through the cavern, but it did sound to me as if the loudest yeeple of all was coming from a point at the farther end of the rock-walled room, not far from the big open entrance. That single voice was so loud and harsh that I glanced in that direction. Something in the formation of the rocks, half visible in the dawn, told me that I should have searched there for the hidden passageway. I wondered—but I saw no yappers.

All that I saw was Lucia standing just outside the cavern, her lithe figure silhouetted against the pink sky, the jar of specimens in her hand. Then—

Crackle! Crackle! Bang! Pop! Pop-pety! *Pwoo-o-o-oh!*

The flame touched the purple mass, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the deadly yappers were a thing of the past. A horrid stench rose out of the cloud of smoke, and Monty and I rushed out for fresh air.

I heard a frantic scream. Lucia's scream. It paralyzed me with terror. I froze to the spot, but only for an instant. Then I saw what her wild eyes were seeing—a mountain of bloated human flesh hovering over me—two great mad yellow eyes coming down upon me—a bloody blade swishing through the air.

There could be only an instant of time between that falling blade and my death. It was a lucky instant for me. A sharp *wham!* and the upraised steel swerved. Glass crashed against the cavern wall as the specimen jar glanced off the blade and flew to its destruction. In that flash I was out of reach.

The huge body charged at Monty. He ducked out of reach and fled. The fumes were so dense that I lost sight of the Mad Hermit for the next moment. Then I saw him bolt out of the cloud of smoke toward Lucia.

The girl did not scream. She ran—almost flew—but her third step was fatal. Her foot slipped on a stone, she went down. Two more steps and the Mad Hermit would be over her. My revolver went into action—once, twice, three times.

With each bark of the gun the mammoth form drew up straighter. The

knife slipped from the upraised hand and slithered down over the back. The bloated form slumped backwards with an unearthly groan. The last sounds to pass the contorted lips were "Yeeple, yeeple!" the high pain-stricken call to the vanished yappers.

The Mad Hermit was done.

THE END

« WHY FISH DIE OUT OF WATER »

THE common belief is that fish die when taken out of water because the atmospheric oxygen cannot be absorbed through the fishes' gills into their blood streams. But experiments by Professor A. G. Huntsman of the University of Toronto have proved that this is not the true cause of death.

The fish die because they exert themselves so much in their efforts to get back into the water that they literally wear themselves out. Upon examining the tissues of fish that have died out of water, Prof. Huntsman found that all the glycogen, which is the energy yielding sugar for

fish—corresponding to our human dextrose sugar—has been completely used up. He also examined the blood and found an unusually high amount of lactic acid which is the chemical remains caused by extreme muscular exertion, further proving the new theory.

As a "clincher" for his arguments, Prof. Huntsman shows that extremely nervous fish like the herring or haddock will exert themselves more when removed from water and thus die faster than a more placid fish like the eel or catfish who, because they take things easy, often can live for a long period out of water.—*Herbert Jones.*

« COBRA VENOM FOR CANCER RELIEF »

SUITABLE doses of cobra venom injected into patients suffering from inoperable cancer gives great relief from pain. Patients who had been getting morphine for their pain were able, with the aid of the cobra venom, to get along with much smaller doses of morphine or to do without it entirely.

Snake poison is not a cure for cancer however, it merely relieves the suffering in cancers that are too far advanced to be removed by operation.

Study of this treatment indicates that cobra

venom relieves pain in much the same way morphine does, through its action on the cerebrum, but without exacting the narcotic effects of the latter.

In nearly three-fourths of the series of cases so far studied, the results of the use of cobra venom for inoperable cancer have been decidedly favorable so far as relieving pain is concerned. The pain-relieving action of cobra venom is not due to a local anesthetic effect but to its action on the nerve centers of the brain.—*E. Wall.*

« THE STUBBORN SKUNK »

THE skunk is probably the most independent and stubborn of all animals. He knows that the offensive gas he can produce at will forces man and beast alike to take a wide detour when they sight Mr. Skunk.

This relative immunity through the ages has made the skunk so cocky that they even expected the automobile to respect them. However, much to their chagrin and regret, the skunk holds no terror for the automobile which has run over

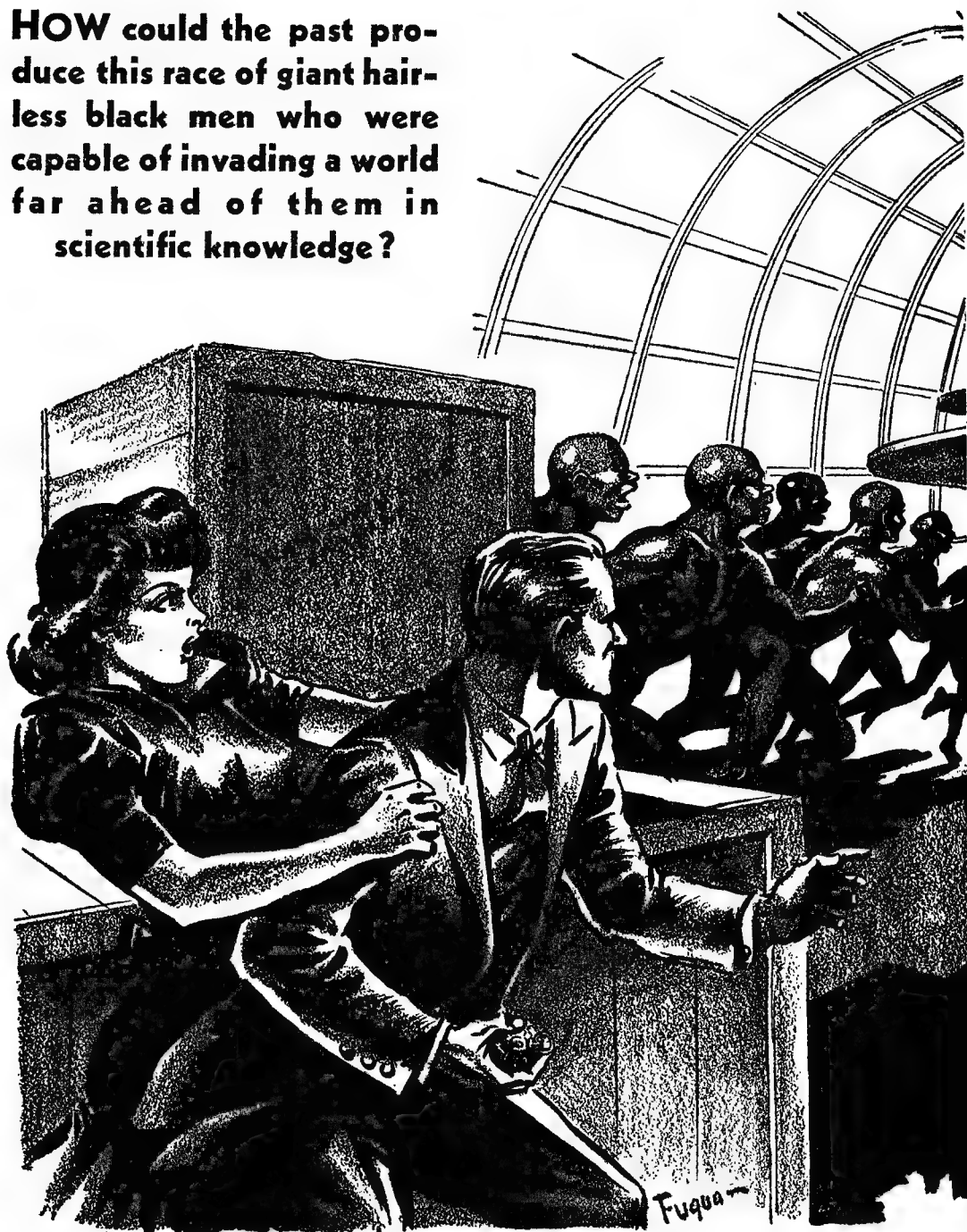
a great number of skunks before they could even lay down their gas barrage.

A few years ago, two men conducted a test by counting all the dead animals killed by autos during a 600 mile trip through the east. They found 22 dead animals—and all of them were skunks.

I'm afraid, Mr. Skunk, you'd better move over when Mr. Motorist comes into sight, for you've met your master.—*Robert Michael McIntosh.*

THE INFINITE

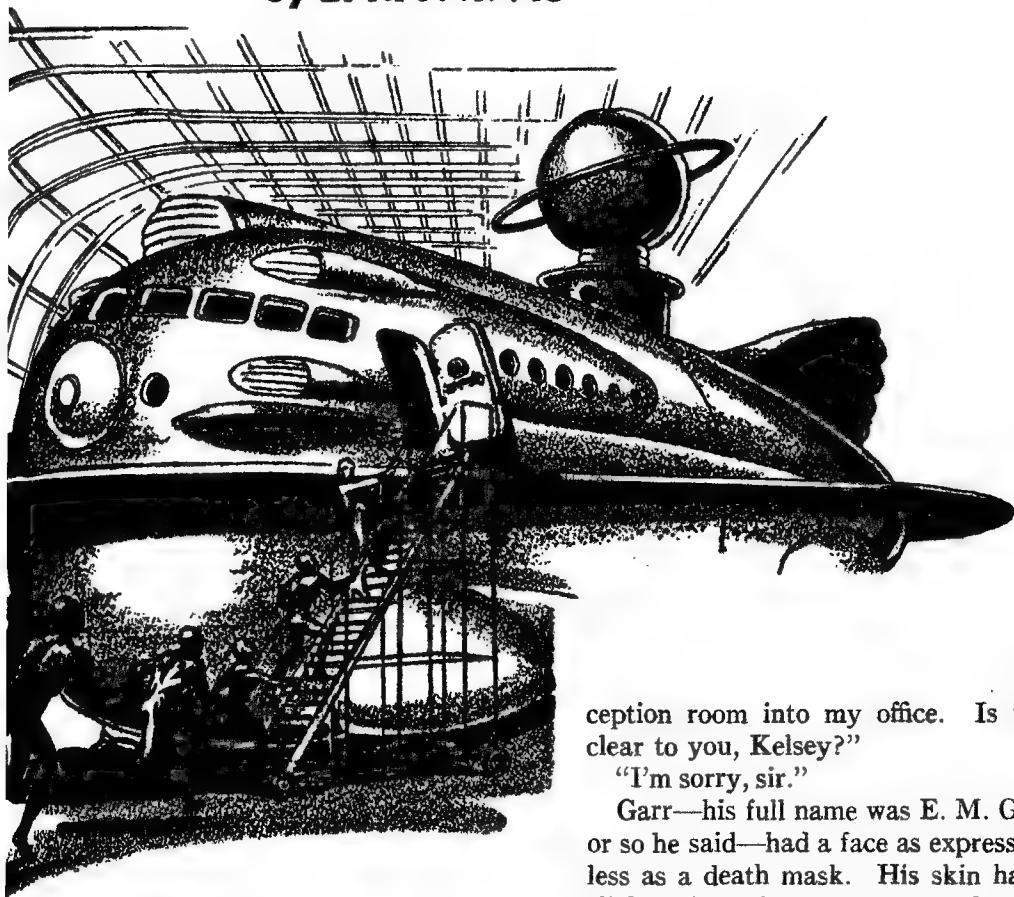
HOW could the past produce this race of giant hairless black men who were capable of invading a world far ahead of them in scientific knowledge?



A horde of black giants raced toward the time ship

INVASION...

by E. K. JARVIS



YOU took thirty-eight seconds to answer the buzzer, Kelsey!"

Garr snapped at me as I entered his private office.

"I—I was on the telephone, sir. I came as quickly as I could."

"You were on the telephone! Are you offering that as an excuse, Kelsey?"

"N-no, sir."

"I believe you understand that when I buzz for you, you are to drop everything and answer at once. I believe that you know I allow you fifteen seconds to get from your desk in the re-

ception room into my office. Is that clear to you, Kelsey?"

"I'm sorry, sir."

Garr—his full name was E. M. Garr, or so he said—had a face as expressionless as a death mask. His skin had a slight yellow tint and to me, at least, it seemed to ooze grease from every pore. He had thin, claw-like hands and he affected vile Turkish cigarettes, which he smoked in a long holder. But to me his most forbidding characteristic was his eyes. They were so black it was impossible to tell where the pupil left off and the iris began. If his face never registered an expression, his eyes more than made up for this lack. They could, and did, register any emotion from cold, harsh anger to contemptuous disdain. The only emotion I never saw in them was love, but then he never loved anybody but E. M. Garr.

Although the legend on the door of his suite of offices said CONSULTANT he was in reality an astrologer, a sort of fortune teller; but if you get the impression that he read tea leaves for neurotic old maids for the price of a dollar, you are mistaken. His fees started at one hundred dollars. At that price you got exactly fifteen minutes of his time and I never knew him to allow a hundred dollar customer to stay ten seconds beyond the allotted period. He timed every interview by means of an expensive stop watch that had a sweep second hand. If you wonder where Garr got customers who were willing and able to pay his prices, all I can tell you is that he got them from the millionaire class. There is nothing as timid as a millionaire, especially where money is concerned. One thing about Garr, he seemed to satisfy his customers, for they kept coming back. To me, this seemed odd. It also seemed odd for Garr to decree that fifteen seconds after he buzzed for me, I was to be in his office—or else!

"THIS is the second time within a week that you have been slow in answering the buzzer," Garr said.

Probably my face got red. I don't know about that. I do know that I wanted to reach across his fancy mahogany desk, which was littered with sheets of paper covered with the strange hieroglyphics that he used to make his calculations, and smack him on his aristocratic nose! There was one reason why I didn't do it, the same reason that kept me working for him in a job that galled my soul.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said.

He looked me over, his black eyes registering a contempt that he did not bother to try to conceal.

"Being sorry doesn't help," he stated.

"No, sir." I could feel my hands

balling into fists. He was deliberately riding me, taking advantage of the hold he had over me.

"If it happens again, I shall withhold from your salary five dollars for every second you are late," he said.

I didn't say anything. I didn't trust myself to speak. If I opened my mouth, I would tell him what I thought of him and I couldn't afford to do that.

"I want you to carry a message for me," he said, after a moment of silence. Garr had an aversion to telephones—the wires might be tapped. He didn't like to write letters, either; they might fall into the wrong hands. Consequently he frequently used me to carry messages. He knew he could trust me.

"Yes, sir," I said. If he wanted me to carry a message to one of his clients, I was willing. Anything to get out of his presence.

"You will go to 209 East Columbus Street," he said. I must have started a little at the address. I know I showed surprise when I heard the name of the man I was to see. "There you will find a man by the name of John Emerson—What are you looking so shocked about, Kelsey?" His voice had the sting of a whip in it.

"Is that the John Emerson who is the inventor?" I gasped.

"Yes," Garr snapped. "What of it?"

"Nothing. Nothing, sir. I was just a little surprised, that's all."

"Ah!" Garr said. He leaned back in his chair. "Do you know Emerson?"

"I—no. Yes, I know of him. Everybody has heard of John Emerson," I floundered. "The newspapers call him the second Edison."

Garr stared suspiciously at me. His face showed no emotion but his eyes seemed to be digging into my soul, probing my secret thoughts.

"Is Emerson a friend of yours?" he asked.

"No," I answered promptly.

His eyes drilled into me. "You're lying, Kelsey," he said calmly. "You're trying to hide something."

He was either a shrewd judge of men or he had my number. He always knew when I was lying.

"He isn't really a friend," I hedged. "He was a kind of a friend of my family and I used to know him when I was a kid." This was strictly the truth, as far as it went. It didn't go all the way. Sure, John Emerson was my friend. I saw him frequently, though I admit I didn't always go to his laboratory to see him. "What message do you want me to deliver, sir?"

GARR looked at me. "You're still lying, Kelsey," he said. There was contempt in his eyes, contempt because I was a poor liar. It got under my skin.

"I don't have the right to call Emerson my friend," I snapped. "But I wish to hell I did! I don't have the right to call any honest man my friend, and you know it. What I want to know is, how did you get your hooks into Emerson? What are you trying to do with him? He isn't rich enough to interest you and he isn't big enough fool to fall for your line of hokum—"

"Shut up!" Garr interrupted. His voice was calm with the sure knowledge of his power but his eyes were hot with rage. He sat there at his desk and didn't move a muscle but he looked at me and through me and made me feel mean and cheap and helpless. That was the thing that hurt the worst, the knowledge that I was helpless.

"In the first place," he continued, "Emerson is working on something for me, if that will make you feel any better—"

It did make me feel better. "This is the first I have heard of it," I said.

"I am under no obligation to confide

in you," Garr said.

"What message do you want me to take to him?" I asked, keeping my voice under control.

"That's better," Garr said. "Tell Emerson that he is to have his device in operation tonight at one minute past midnight, without fail. This is of the greatest importance. At one minute past midnight, without fail. *Under no circumstances is he to test it before that time!*"

This didn't make sense to me but that didn't make any difference. A lot of the things Garr told me to do didn't make any sense. I saw only parts of his business; he took care that neither I nor anyone else ever saw the whole picture. He made me repeat the message, to make sure I had it right.

"Is that all, sir?" I asked.

"One other thing," Garr answered. "Your job around here is to obey orders, not to question them. If you ever defy me again—" his black eyes blazed with anger—"you know what will happen to you! Do you understand me clearly, Kelsey?"

"Y—yes, sir," I said.

"Then get out!" he barked.

I got out. I was so hot I don't remember getting in the elevator, and when I got out on the main floor I was still so nearly blind from helpless anger that I bumped into a man without noticing him.

"Don, you old war dog," he said. "You ought to notice where you are going."

I LOOKED up. Doug Rommer was grinning at me. He was wearing a floppy felt hat, his shirt collar was frayed, he was smoking a foul pipe. He hadn't been smoking a pipe the first time I met him, but I'll bet he had been wearing the same grin, although I hadn't been able to see it. I met him in

Kamchatka. This was in June 1943, exactly three years ago, when the Japs were learning the full price they were going to pay for Pearl Harbor, for Singapore, for Java, for Burma and Bataan. They didn't like that price either, they didn't like it a little bit, when their own skies were full of bombers and the price of Pearl Harbor was coming out of their hide. They paid it, though, and maybe, a hundred years from now, some Jap will be born who will not run a mile when he hears the word MacArthur spoken. Maybe!

I was going down over Kamchatka when I met Rommer, riding in the seat of a P-47, on patrol with a squadron. There were a lot of fuzzy clouds in the sky, ideal hiding places for Zeros.* There were Zeros in them, too. Suddenly the sky was full of Jap planes and with equal quickness it was full of dog fights as we squared off and met them. I don't remember much about the fight. It was just another skirmish. The P-47 had two thousand horses in its nose and lots of guns. After a few minutes, I found myself off to one side, with a dead Jappo twisting like a falling leap as he went to hell. The main fight was miles away by now. I headed toward it. I never did see the Zero come out of the clouds and I didn't know a Jap plane was near until a cannon shot set my motor on fire. There was only one thing to do—bail out. I did it.

I got out without a scratch. My chute opened. My poor plane went floating down, leaving a long trail of smoke behind it. I saw it crash and explode. The loss of the plane didn't matter much. For every one that went

down, the factories back home were making four to replace it. With the rugged hills of Kamchatka below me, I was safe enough.

Then the Zero came back. I could see him coming. He was in a long slant headed straight for me. There was no doubt about his intentions. He was going to shoot me. I still remember with horror those long seconds during which the Jap plane lanced toward me. I wake up at night in a cold sweat with the memory of that Zero slanting at me.

Off to the left, I saw something else—an American plane. I remember trying to scream at him to look in my direction. The Zero was getting closer, lining up so he would get me with the first burst.

THEN the American plane almost lost its wings as the pilot jerked it in my direction. It flipped around like a leaf in a high wind. The pilot had seen me. He was coming to rescue me. I held my breath. It was a close race and my life was the prize. Because he had two thousand horses in the nose of his ship, the American pilot won it. He caught the Zero just before the Zero got me—and blasted the Jap plane out of the sky! Then he rode herd on me all the way to the ground. I can close my eyes and see him yet, grimly circling me, daring any Jap to turn up. To me, he looked like an angel straight from heaven. When I had landed, he wagged his wings at me and went tearing off. I made my way back to our forces.

That was how I met Doug Rommer. He was the pilot of the plane that saved my life. After the war had ended, he had returned to Chicago, but because danger had become necessary for his existence, he had found it hard to settle down. He had become a private detective, one of the best in the business, a grinning, devil-may-care sleuth who

*In the middle of 1943, the Japs still had a few Zeros, their fast navy fighter, left. They didn't have the factories that made them, however. The Flying Fortresses had got to their plants. By the end of 1943, they didn't have any planes of any description left, or anything else, for that matter. —ED.

asked no odds of danger.

He grinned at me now, and, as he saw the expression on my face, the grin faded into a thoughtful frown.

"What's wrong, Don?" he asked. "You look as if you had lost your best friend."

"It's scarcely as bad as that," I answered. "Doug, how are you? How's tricks and things?"

"Everything is fine," he said. "Don, I was just coming up to see you. I want you to help me."

He could have the shirt off my back and he knew it. He could have my last dime, my last cigarette. Hell, if it hadn't been for him, I would be pushing up Kamchatkan daisies now! "You want me to help you!" I laughed. "Hell, Doug, you know you can have anything I own. What's on your mind?"

He should have laughed then; a laugh always came easy to him. But he didn't laugh. He looked keenly at me. "I'm on the trail of a blackmailer," he said quietly. "Personally, I think this fellow ought to be hanged. I think maybe you can help me hang him, if you will?"

"If I will?" I echoed. I was a little startled. So far as I knew, none of my acquaintances were blackmailers, but if they were and if Doug Rommer asked me to help him catch them, I would certainly do what he asked. "Anything I can do, I will do," I said. "Who is this fellow?"

"His name," Rommer said, looking straight at me, "is E. M. Garr!"

"What?" I gasped.

"E. M. Garr!" Rommer repeated. "He pretends to be an astrologer but he is, in reality, a blackmailer—"

"SHUT up!" I hissed. "Doug, you don't know what you're saying!" I was looking frantically around us. The lobby was crowded with people passing

in and out of the building. Any of them might hear what Rommer was saying. I did not know definitely, but I had strong suspicions that Garr maintained a strong-arm squad. Certain husky men with hard faces came and went at odd times. They never stopped at my reception desk and asked me if Garr was in, and Garr let them out the back way himself. I had a hunch they frequently came and went the back way without my knowledge. Any of the people in the crowded lobby might be in Garr's pay and might report what Rommer had said.

"I do know what I'm saying," Rommer repeated. "I think Garr is a blackmailer and I'm out to prove it."

He didn't give a damn if he was overheard. That was the kind of a guy he was. He called a spade a spade, and if anybody didn't like it, they could darned well lump it.

"You can't say that!" I hissed. "Do you want to be found up some alley with a couple of bullets through your guts! Shut up, Doug, for Pete's sake!"

I was frantic and I tried to walk away. Rommer saw how scared I was and he dropped the subject. But he walked along with me and I knew he wanted to talk to me.

"I'm going to see an inventor," I said, hailing a cab outside. "You can go along with me. We can talk on the way."

"An inventor?" he said. "His name wouldn't be Emerson, would it?"

"Yes. But how the devil did you know?"

"I didn't," he answered, grinning. "You wouldn't, by any chance, be going to see his secretary instead, would you, Don?"

I stared at him in open-mouthed amazement. In the past year I had been in Emerson's laboratory dozens of times, but to tell the strict truth, I

didn't go there to see the inventor. There was a girl who worked for him as a sort of combination secretary and lab assistant. Her name was Lucy Trent. There may be more beautiful girls in the world but I have not seen them. To be frank, since I first saw Lucy, I have not noticed other girls and for all I know, there may not be any other girls on earth. There aren't for me, anyhow.

"H—how did you know about Lucy?" I asked.

"A good detective knows everything," he said, grinning. Then the grin left his face. "About Garr, now. Will you help me?"

"I—" That was all I could say. The words stuck in my throat. They wouldn't come.

"Will you?"

"Doug, you don't know what you're asking."

"I know I'm asking you to help me catch a rat," he said grimly. "If you have any false ideas of loyalty to an employer—"

"No!" I shouted. "He employs me but that doesn't make any difference. I would help you—"

"But you won't? Is that what you're saying?"

"Doug, I can't. I'll do anything under the sun for you, except this. I can't—"

WE were in the cab, going south on State Street. Rommer looked grim. "Are you mixed up in this business too, Don?" he asked.

"Doug," I said desperately, "to the best of my knowledge, Garr is not a blackmailer. If he is, I know nothing of it—"

"He *is*!" Rommer said. "Are you in it, too? Is that why you won't help me?"

His voice was tense and the hot tones

of anger showed in it.

"No," I said. "I'm no blackmailer. You didn't need to ask that question, Doug, and you know it."

He squirmed a little then, and traces of an apology showed in the tones of his voice. "Then why don't you help me?"

"Because—Doug, *I can't!*" Perhaps I wailed the words. I know there was sweat on the palms of my hands and sweat running down my face. I would have given anything to help Rommer, but I knew what would happen if I did, what would happen if I even told him why I couldn't help him.

He was inexorable. "Why?" he said.

"I can't tell you that, either."

He looked at me. His face was grave. "Don, if you have gotten into something that you can't get out of, and if I can do anything for you, you know you have only to ask me."

"I know," I said desperately. "But there is nothing you or anyone else can do."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It's worse than that."

He shut up then, but when he looked at me there was compassion on his face. I knew he was wondering what hold Garr had over me but he didn't ask any more questions, for which I was grateful.

"Who hired you to investigate Garr?" I asked him.

He didn't answer, evading the issue by changing the subject, and I didn't press him. We dropped the subject entirely. Rommer seemed to sweep the whole matter from his mind but I could tell he was still thinking about it.

One thing he had said was damned important to me. Garr was a blackmailer! This was strictly news to me. Oddly, if Garr was a blackmailer, there was a thin chance that this fact might open a way for me to escape from the

spot I was in.

Night had already fallen over Chicago. It was early evening, barely dusk in fact, and the street lights were just coming on. Emerson's laboratory was in an old converted residence on a short street just south of the Loop.

When we pulled into the short street, we found it was blocked by a squad car. Two cops in uniform were busy trying to catch some small animal. It was an alert, quick-moving little beast about as big as a dog. It wasn't a dog. It had a long bushy tail, pointed ears, a long muzzle, and hooves. The cab driver pulled to one side and stopped.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Darned if I know," Rommer said. He sounded puzzled. "If I didn't know it was impossible, I would say it is a little horse."

It did look like a horse except that it wasn't as big, even, as a pony. It was a very sagacious little beast and the cops were having the devil's own time trying to catch it. Every time they got it cornered it dodged around them, its little hooves clattering on the pavement. Finally it dodged into a alcove from which there was no escape and they did catch it. They came carrying it back to their squad car.

"What have you got there?" I called to them.

"Don't know, buddy," one of them answered. "We were cruising by and we saw it in the street. It looks like a pygmy horse, except that there isn't any such thing. We're going to take it over to the zoo and see if they know what it is."

A pygmy horse playing on the streets of Chicago! I dismissed it from my mind and went on to the lab to see Emerson and deliver my message, Rommer waiting in the cab for me. I had more important things on my mind than a horse that hadn't grown up, or so I

very casually thought at the time.

CHAPTER II

The Shadow in the Laboratory

EMERSON'S laboratory was in an old converted residence. Affixed to the wall near the front door was a brass plate with the words:
RING BELL FOR ADMITTANCE.

You could ring that bell for hours and never get an answer. It was strictly a brush-off to discourage salesmen, reporters, publicity hounds, and all the rest of that brazen tribe who will, if given an opportunity, intrude themselves on every person of any prominence. If you wanted to see Emerson you went around the house to a large brick addition he had built on to the rear and simply walked in. Once in, you could stay as long as you wanted. He was too kind-hearted to throw anybody out.

As I took the passage that led to the rear I saw that lights were burning in the laboratory. If the lights were on, the inventor was in. For that matter, he was always in. I could see his shadow thrown on the frosted glass windows. It was a grotesque thing, huge and without shape. I whistled, on the odd chance that Lucy was still there and would hear me. The shadow twisted at the sound of my whistle, then disappeared.

I walked into the laboratory and almost stepped on Emerson. He was lying face downward on the floor, one hand outstretched, at the side of the workbench that ran the full length of the room. An over-turned stool lay near him.

My first shocked thought was that he had suffered a heart attack while working and had fallen off the stool. He was an old man and he had already

had one or two bouts with his heart. I stooped to pick him up—and recoiled in horror.

He was lying in a pool of blood.

"Mr. Emerson! What happened?" I gasped.

Not until then did I notice that he was supporting himself on one elbow. His face was only two or three inches off the floor and he seemed not to have the strength to lift it higher. He didn't notice me. A look of desperation on his face, he was staring at his outstretched hand. The hand was moving slowly. Emerson was writing in blood on the floor a single word:

RMOAHAL

He was using his own blood as ink, his index finger for a pen!

There were a thousand things that I should have done. I can think of them, now, easily enough but at the moment, I was paralyzed. My mind simply would not work. I had read of murdered men writing a last message in their own blood but I had never expected to see it happening right before my own eyes. I dropped to my knees beside him.

"Mr. Emerson! Was there an accident? Are you badly hurt?"

I took hold of him, intending to pick him up and carry him to a bed. He cried out in pain when my fingers touched him, then he recognized me and gasped my name.

"Don't touch me!" he whispered. "The pain—too much—"

"But I want to help you."

"You can't help me. Nobody can help me. Done for—"

"Was it an accident?"

"No accident! Rmoahal!" He pointed toward the word he had written in blood on the floor.

I thought he was out of his head.

Rmoahal was a crazy combination of letters that had no meaning. I tried again to pick him up but he screamed when I touched him.

"Don't touch me, Don! Can't stand—to be touched!"

"What happened, sir?" I begged.

"Garr!" he whispered.

"You mean Garr did this to you?" I demanded.

"No," he answered. "Rmoahal. I was—working on invention for Garr. Finished invention today. Tested it. Mesohippus. Went in wrong direction. Don't understand it myself. Accident. Tell Garr—got Rmoahal. Danger, Don. Warn Garr not to use—machine—" He managed to lift himself on one elbow and looked across the room to a huge machine that looked a little like a cyclotron. I had seen the machine before. Emerson had been working on it for months.

"Don't let anyone use machine, Don," he whispered. "Don't let anybody! Danger—danger—time—"

Strength was ebbing out of him. Blankness was appearing in his eyes. He seemed to gather himself for one final message.

"Stay out of time, Don," he whispered. "Make everybody stay out of time. Destroy—machine—"

HE SIGHED. There was something child-like in the way he laid his head on his arm, something that made me think of a six-year-old boy, all tired out with play, lying down for a little nap. Emerson was not a six-year-old; he was an old man and the nap he was taking was the nap that never ends.

There was silence in the laboratory, complete silence. In the far distance I could hear the dim, never-ceasing hum, that is the noise of Chicago muttering to itself. It is composed of the honk of taxicabs, the shrill of whistles

of the police directing traffic, the clatter of street cars, the rumble of the elevated trains. But here in the lab there was silence. Emerson was dead. His body was one of the most horrible sights I have ever seen, not because he was dead, but because of something that had happened to him before he died, something that had caused his death.

His body had been *twisted*! His death had not been caused by a bullet and no knife had been plunged into his vitals. He looked as if he had been caught in a gigantic vise and squeezed in a dozen different directions at the same time. His arms, his legs, had been bent, and then bent again, and again. He must have suffered terrible agony. I could not begin to guess what had killed him. The weapon—if a weapon had been used—was beyond the range of my experience.

I got to my feet. There was nothing I could do for Emerson. And I kept remembering I had seen a shadow in this laboratory just before I entered it. At the time I had thought it was the shadow of the inventor, thrown by some odd light effect against the glass of the windows. But I had come directly into the lab and found Emerson on the floor. He couldn't have caused that shadow.

Then what had caused it?

I looked around the lab. The place was deserted. There wasn't a sound, except—I listened again. The back wall of the lab was flush with the alley that ran at the rear. Somebody was hurrying along that alley. I could hear his footsteps. He was— The back door rattled. He was coming in. I ducked down behind a bench. The door opened.

"It got away, Mr. Emerson," a voice said. "I looked everywhere and I couldn't find it. Shall I call the police

and tell them to be on the lookout for a little horse—Oh!" The intruder gasped as I got to my feet.

It was Lucy Trent. I had recognized her voice.

"Don! You startled me!" she gasped.

There was one thing that I didn't want to happen, and another thing that I did. I didn't want her to see Emerson's body, and I wanted to get her out of this place—quickly. Apparently she had been working over-time helping the inventor on one of his experiments. Why she was here didn't matter. The important thing was to get her away as soon as possible.

"Where did you come from?" she asked. My sudden appearance had startled her but she had recovered from her surprise. She smiled. "Is this your night to play jack-in-the-box—What's the matter, Don? Is something wrong?"

The expression on my face must have warned her that everything was not right.

"Hello, Lucy," I said. "I came by in the hope that I would still find you here. How about me and you going to dinner, huh?"

I didn't know whether or not anybody was listening, but I had not forgotten that shadow, and if we had an eavesdropper, I wanted to fool him for a few seconds—long enough to get Lucy out of here. I started toward her.

"Dinner? I'd love it. But, Don—"

"Good," I said quickly. "Take off that lab smock and we'll be on our way. Don't tell me you have to powder your nose. You can do that in the cab." If I could help it, she wasn't getting time to do any thinking. I started to help her take off the smock she was wearing. "You look beautiful tonight, baby," I said gayly. "We'll drop by your apartment so you can change clothes, then we'll head for bright

lights, music, and food. How does that strike you, huh?"

"I'd love it!" Her eyes glistened.

"But—where is Mr. Emerson?"

"He went for a walk."

"**H**E DID?" There was doubt in her voice. "That's odd. He said he was going to be very busy tonight. Don, the strangest thing happened a while ago. A little horse wandered right into the lab. At least, I guess it had wandered in. I had gone out to post some letters and when I got back it was here, and Mr. Emerson was trying to catch it. It got out the back door and Mr. Emerson said I should chase it. It was the cutest little thing! You should have seen it."

"Um!" I choked over the words. The little horse the cops had caught had been here in the lab! Did that mean anything? "Well, you never can tell where you will find a horse these days!" I said.

"Mr. Emerson said it was a mesohippus," she continued. She frowned a little then. "I've heard of eohippus. Eo means dawn in Greek and eohippus means dawn horse. But mesohippus—Meso means middle in Greek and mesohippus would mean middle horse. But how would a mesohippus get here in Chicago now? They vanished millions of years ago!" She was talking to herself.

I was having heart failure. Not only was there a dead man lying on the floor in this laboratory but I had the strong suspicion that the murderer was not far off. I didn't want to alarm Lucy if I could help it, but I desperately wanted to get out of this place. At the same time, if the murderer was listening in, I didn't want him to know that I suspected his presence. That might be all he needed to convince him that he ought to knock us off, too.

"Let's skip the heavy science for tonight, Lucy. Come on. I'm hungry as a wolf."

"Just a second and I'll be ready." She pulled out a compact and started to inspect her complexion. I groaned. She was an expert laboratory technician, able and willing to talk science by the hour, but she was a woman, too, and she had to be certain that her face was fixed right. I didn't blame her for that. If I could have told her why I wanted her to hurry, she would have tossed the compact out the window. I suffered agonies before she was ready to go.

"We'll go out the back," I said.

She laughed. "So you are walking me through an alley tonight, Don Kelsey?"

"It's closer that way," I grumbled. I didn't want to take her out the door by which I had entered. If we went that way, she would see Emerson. We started toward the back. From somewhere in the quiet laboratory came a soft creak.

Lucy glanced back over her shoulder. Her eyes opened in startled horror and a sudden, convulsive shudder shook her body.

"Don!" she gasped.

I turned around.

There was a third door into the laboratory, an entrance that led directly to the residence in front. When I entered the lab, this door had been closed. It was open now. A shadow stood in front of it.

At least my first dazed impression was that the thing that was standing there staring so intently at us was a shadow. It was so black that it looked like a shadow, but the blackness came from the color of its skin. Except for a broad belt made of linked metal circling the waist, it was naked. It was human; or it had been human millions

of years in the past or it would be human millions of years in the future, but its shape was that of a normal human being, except that it was at least seven feet tall.

A black giant seven feet tall, muscled like a superb wrestler! Its head was utterly hairless, as smooth and as black as a bowling ball.

Suspended from the metal belt that circled the waist was a holster of some kind. It was empty now. The weapon—I remember thinking it looked like a gun straight out of Buck Rogers—that belonged in the holster was pointing straight at us.

“WHO the devil are you?” I gasped. “Do not move,” the giant answered. “If you obey me, you will live. If you disobey me, I will treat you as I treated him.” A flick of the weapon pointed toward the spot where Emerson was lying.

In so many words, this giant admitted that he had killed the inventor. Lucy looked in the direction in which this black beast had pointed and for the first time she saw Emerson. She cried out and started toward him.

The weapon in the giant’s hand centered directly on her. He was utterly casual about it. He had told us not to move and she had moved. He was going to destroy her.

I grabbed her.

“Don! Mr. Emerson is hurt.”

“He’s worse than hurt, he’s dead. And we’ll be dead too, if we don’t do what this devil says!” I gritted. “Keep quiet and don’t move.”

The tone of my voice shocked her into obedience. Poor kid, she had not realized our danger. She had not realized there was *any* danger. I wiped sweat from my face and turned back to the giant. He was calmly regarding us. If we had been two bugs under a

microscope, he could not have been more detached in his manner.

“I recognize the instinctive tendency,” he said, in a satisfied tone of voice. “It is the urge of the male to protect the female in time of danger.”

One moment he was about to kill us; the next moment he was analyzing our emotions.

“W—what?” I gasped.

He looked at me and I had the impression that he was probing to the depths of my mind. There was a hypnotic quality about his gaze that held me spellbound. When he had finished his scrutiny, he ignored my question.

“I require to speak to a person by the name of Garr!” he said. “Bring him to me!”

“Garr!”

“Certainly. Bring him to me.”

“Bring him to you!” I floundered. “How?”

“By the use of your mind, of course. Call him.”

I didn’t know what to say. This giant seemed to have the impression that I could send out some kind of a mental impulse which Garr would hear and come running to answer. I was already in a daze. This idea of summoning a person by the use of the mind was merely another mad fact that, to me, had no meaning. When I said I couldn’t do it, the giant seemed to think I was stalling. Anger clouded his face and for an instant I had the impression he was about to destroy me. Then he seemed to remember something.

“Ah, yes,” he said. “Of course. It is impossible for you to do what I ask. Your race does not know how to use telepathy. Very well. Take me to Garr.”

If he wanted to go to Garr, there was nothing I could do except take him. But I hadn’t forgotten that Rommer was still waiting out in front. If I

could walk this black giant past the detective, Rommer would know that something was very much wrong.

"Of course I will take you to Garr," I said. "Come, Lucy." I started toward the side door. One glimpse of this black monster would be all that Rommer needed to go into action. We could trap this giant!

If I do say so myself, this was fast thinking in a pinch. The only thing that was wrong with it was that it didn't work. When I started toward the side exit, the giant grunted.

"We will go out this way," he said, pointing to the back door. "I suspect, if I go the way you want me to, that I will find myself in a trap."

He seemed to be able to read my mind.

We went out the back door.

CHAPTER III

Garr's Ambition

"WHAT the devil are you doing here, Kelsey?" Garr demanded, when he opened the door of his private office and saw Lucy and me. "What do you mean by bringing women around here at night—"

Then he saw the black giant standing behind us. Never before had Garr's face displayed emotion. His eyes had always revealed his feelings, with the face remaining cold and unmoved. It revealed emotion now. Shocked surprise appeared on it, then bewilderment, then delight.

"A Rmoahal!" he gasped. "But—but contact was not to be established until—until one minute past midnight. I—I had planned to be present—when contact was established. I—"

Garr was actually at a loss for words! He looked like a man whose dreams have come true beyond his

wildest expectations. The sight sent a chill through me. Anything Garr dreamed of, was bound to be bad.

"The cursed inventor made a mistake!" the giant angrily said. "He disobeyed orders and tested his device before the proper time. His error caused us much inconvenience and may cause all our plans to miscarry. You fool! Why did not you not instruct this inventor that his machine, under no circumstances, was to be set in operation before the designated time?"

Garr looked like he had swallowed a mouthful of mud. He was not accustomed to being called a fool and he didn't like it.

"I did so instruct him," he snapped. He glared at me. "Did you deliver my message?"

"N—no."

For a second, so murderous was the light in his eyes, I thought he was going to spring at my throat. "You ignorant fool!" he shouted. "Didn't I tell you to deliver that message without fail? What did you do? Pick up this damned girl and waste your time with her instead of doing as you were told?"

I could have smacked him for that but it wouldn't have done any good. "I didn't have a chance to deliver your message," I said.

"You didn't! Don't lie to me! You left here hours ago. You had plenty of time—"

"I went straight to Emerson's laboratory. When I got there, I found him dead." I told him exactly what had happened, with the exception of my talk with Rommer.

"You're lying. You deliberately failed to deliver my message!"

"I did exactly what you told me to do!"

"Then how did Emerson happen to have his machine in operation before

the designated time?"

"I—I don't know what the devil you're talking about. Remember, I only work here. You told me to deliver a message and I tried to deliver it."

My life was hanging in the balance and I knew it. Garr was angry enough to kill me. The giant standing behind us was silent but I had seen enough of him to know that he would blast me out of existence with no more compunction than he would display in stepping on a bug.

"I think I can explain what happened," Lucy spoke for the first time.

"Who the devil are you?" Garr snapped.

She flushed but answered readily enough. "I am—*was* sort of an assistant to Mr. Emerson."

"I didn't know he had an assistant. He told me he worked alone."

"He does—*did*. I took care of his correspondence and helped him in his work when I could. If you are referring to the invention on which he has been working for the past few months—"

"Do you know what that invention was?" Garr asked quickly.

"No. Mr. Emerson didn't tell me, except to say it was something extra special that he was developing for somebody else."

Garr seemed a little relieved at that. "All right. What happened?"

"Mr. Emerson finished it this afternoon. And—well, I was with him and I think he understood he was not to put it into operation until the person for whom he was developing it told him to. But he—well, he wanted to be certain it would work properly and I think he tested it to see if it was all right. I was out at the time and I don't *know* that he tested it but I think he probably did. Then something else happened and I went out again. When

I returned, Mr. Kelsey was in the laboratory and—well, I'm sure Mr. Emerson did not receive the message. But that wasn't Mr. Kelsey's fault," she added quickly.

HIS black eyes popping with anger, Garr thought over what she had told him. She gave me an alibi, all right, and probably saved my neck. I didn't know what Emerson's machine was, but obviously the first thing any inventor does when he completes something new is to test it and see if it works.

"It is scarcely my fault that the message was not delivered," Garr said to the silent giant behind us.

"So I see," was the cool answer. "But you are still a fool. You should have delivered the orders yourself, to make certain they were obeyed."

Gar didn't like this answer a bit but he swallowed hard and managed to get it down. He led us into his private office. Apparently he had been in conference, for a couple of hard-looking thugs were waiting in the office. One of them was a stranger to me but the second one had a scar on his cheek and I recognized him. My heart climbed right up into my mouth when I saw him. That scar-faced man was important to me. So far as I was concerned, he was the most important man who ever lived; and if the arrival of the black giant had not completely upset Garr and thrown him off his stride, he would never have let me see his scar-faced henchman. Not alive, anyhow.

Garr was upset. There was no doubt about that. He was surprised and bewildered and frantically worried. Somewhere his plans had gone awry. He forgot all about his two thugs and he forgot all about Lucy and me too. I didn't do anything to call his attention to me. Surreptitiously, I pulled

Lucy against the wall and both of us kept as quiet as possible. To me, the situation looked explosive, and if Garr and the giant started calling each other names, there was an excellent chance that we might learn something.

There was a devil of a lot that I wanted to know. Garr had called this giant a Rmoahal. What was a Rmoahal? If any such race had ever existed on earth, it was news to me. And—where had the giant come from? If he had gone wandering around Chicago dressed as he was, he would certainly have attracted plenty of attention from everybody including the police. Obviously Garr had been in communication with him. They had been planning something. *What?*

"I fail to understand how the fact that you arrived a few hours earlier than we had planned can make any difference," Garr said. "The important fact is that you are here. Even now I can scarcely believe that I have succeeded in bringing a live Rmoahal across four million years of time!" Garr was becoming more and more excited. "A Rmoahal, alive on earth today!"*

If Garr was excited, so was I. If what he said was correct, he had hired Emerson to build a machine that had brought this black giant out of the past!

"Did you hear what Garr said?" I whispered to Lucy.

"Yes."

"He's nuts! I knew he was an astrologer and an occultist but I didn't

think he was that crazy."

"Sh—" she whispered. "I'm afraid he isn't insane."

"What?" I gasped.

"I didn't tell Garr the truth when he asked me if I knew what Mr. Emerson was working on," she whispered tersely. "Mr. Emerson told me about the invention Garr wanted him to develop."

"What was it?"

"It was—" she hesitated and looked queerly at me as if she was wondering whether I would think she had blown her top if she answered my question.

"What was it?" I insisted.

"It was—a kind of a time machine!" she said desperately.

I BACKED against the wall and shut up. Emerson, working under Garr's direction, had been building a time machine! Not only had been building it, but had built it! And, if the presence of this Rmoahal proved anything, the damned thing had worked! The black giant had been brought out of the past. It seemed impossible but I suddenly remembered seeing two cops chase an animal that looked like a little horse. Lucy had called it a mesohippus,* one of the tiny ancestors of the horse of the present day. The only place it could possibly have come from was the time machine. Emerson, in testing his invention, had accidentally brought a mesohippus to the present!

"You are Zorn?" Garr continued, looking at the giant. "You are the Rmoahal whose thought impressions reached my mind across time, who gave me the specifications that I passed on to Emerson so he would be able to build

*The Rmoahals, according to one school of occultist believers, were the first Atlantean sub-race. They are believed to have originated in Lemuria and to have migrated to Atlantis. Coal black in color, they were larger in stature than the men of today, and they first became a race four to five million years ago. The Rmoahals were the ancestors of the Atlantans. They are believed to have possessed many magical powers.—Ed.

*The ancestor of the horse was a tiny animal no larger than a dog, and it had five toes on each of its feet. During the ages the mesohippus has evolved, growing larger, and at each stage losing one of its toes until today it is a large animal with one toe and the rudimentary evidence of a second.—Ed.

the device you needed?"*

"I am Zorn," the Rmoahal said. The way he spoke showed that he was still angry but was making an effort to suppress it. "As I revealed to you, my life was in danger in my own country. I sought to escape into the one place where those who were seeking to destroy me would never be able to find me—into time. In spite of your blundering, you helped me to escape, and I am grateful."

The Rmoahal tried to smile to show his good-will but the effort brought nothing but a wolfish grin to his face. I didn't in the least like the looks of that grin, but Garr didn't seem to find cause for worry in it.

I still didn't see what Garr was getting out of this. Of course the time machine would be a notable scientific achievement and a live Rmoahal in the present would no doubt provide the university professors with an almost inexhaustible source of information; but if I knew Garr, he had not co-operated with this Rmoahal in order to further the advance of scientific knowledge! Garr hated scientists because they doubted the theories of the occultists. He would not do anything to help them. Nor would he be interested in saving Zorn's life. No! There had to be something in this set-up for him. What was it? The only things that interested him were money, and, I always suspected, power. They were his twin

*A sort of super mental telepathy was involved here. Zorn possessed tremendous mental powers and he forced mental concepts across time to Garr's mind. At first Garr thought he was receiving some kind of an inspired revelation, later learning the source of his inspiration. Garr, being an occultist and already familiar with the beliefs concerning the Rmoahals, did not find it difficult to believe he was actually in contact with one of these legendary creatures. The instructions he received for the construction of the actual time machine were beyond his ability to carry out. Consequently he hired an out-standing inventor to do the actual work for him.—Ed.

gods: money and power. His creed was how to win more of them. Fanatical, egotistical, slightly insane, he was of the stuff that Hitlers are made!

The instant the thought popped into my mind, I saw what Garr was seeking, what he hoped to get out of this Rmoahal! Zorn represented power! The Rmoahal, even if he did not possess the magical powers the occultists attributed to his race, certainly possessed a tremendous fund of scientific knowledge. He knew how to build a time machine! That meant a super-intelligence. And the weapon which he had used to kill Emerson, the gun that had produced the terrible twisting effect, was a potent thing. The man or the group of men who possessed a plentiful supply of those weapons would be powerful indeed.

Garr, with this Rmoahal to help him, planned to become a second Hitler! That was what he was getting out of this set-up! Power! If it seems impossible for a ratty occultist to dream of becoming another dictator, Hitler's dreams seemed no less impossible before he began to realize them. Hitler was once a second-class house painter! But before he was smashed, he had painted the world with blood! And if you think that Hitler, conquered and dead and in hell, will never rise again, you are badly mistaken. Hitler was not the first man to dream of conquest; he won't be the last. There will always be men who will try to imitate Hitler, if we give them the chance. Obscure fanatics, mystics, who slowly gather a following about them—Garr!

Garr already had a strong-arm squad that would serve as a party nucleus. Now, with the knowledge of this Rmoahal back of him, he would have power!

IN that air-conditioned office, I was suddenly wet with sweat. Garr had

to be stopped, *now!* Tomorrow might be too late. He had to be destroyed, *now!* From an obscure astrologer, occultist, and black-mailer, he had suddenly been transformed into one of the most dangerous men on earth!

But how to stop him? I didn't have a gun and I was certain Lucy didn't either. Garr might not be armed but the odds were that his two strong-arm men were well supplied. One thing was certain: the Rmoahal had a weapon! It had never left his hand.

"We will begin plans immediately!" Garr exulted. "With you to help me, there is nothing I cannot do."

He was pacing back and forth across his office, and, unless my eyes were lying to me, fine flecks of foam were on his lips.

"I will do everything I can to aid you," Zorn said, the same wolf grin on his black face. "I would suggest that our first move is to return to the laboratory of this inventor who assisted in the construction of this pole of the time machine." *

"Why should we go there?" Garr questioned.

"For several reasons," the Rmoahal answered. "The laboratory is at present unguarded. Someone might enter and discover the time machine. It is important, is it not, that we conceal the existence of this machine? I am not completely familiar with your plans, of course. The telepathic rapport that brought our minds together was not per-

fect, which left me without complete knowledge of your world and of your intentions. But it seems to me to be important to conceal the time machine. Also there is the possibility that the body of the inventor might be found."

"You are right," Garr said. "We must hide that machine. Also, we must remove Emerson's body, at once. We will go to the laboratory."

"What shall we do with these two persons?" Zorn said, pointing to Lucy and me. "I needed them to bring me to you. Are we in further need of them?"

Garr laughed. "I can control the man," he said. "If you think they might betray us, and are suggesting that we eliminate them, there is no need for that. They may be useful to us."

Garr was happy. The things he wanted, money and power, he held within his grasp. That was enough to make him happy.

We started to leave through the back exit. The two thugs went first, then Lucy and me. Garr and the Rmoahal brought up the rear, the latter with the weapon ready in his hand. As we started to leave a knock sounded on the front door.

"Who's there?" Garr excitedly demanded.

"The police," the answer came. "Open up before we knock this door down."

CHAPTER IV

The Escape from Garr

"COPS!" Garr exclaimed. He glanced angrily at me. "Damn you, Kelsey—"

"Hell, Garr, use your head," I snapped. "I didn't call the police and you know it. You can't blame this on me."

I was his favorite goat. If anything

*In reality there were two time machines: one in the time world occupied by the Rmoahal, the other in Emerson's laboratory. In effect, they operated on a principle somewhat similar to that of a gigantic magnet, an etheric current flow taking place between the poles. This etheric current flow was the means by which the passage through time was brought about. Two time machines, one operating as a sender and the other as a receiver, were necessary for the effective control of the object or person being sent through time. Each machine could serve both as sender and receiver.—Ed.

went wrong, he automatically blamed me for it.

"Police?" the Rmoahal said. He hefted his weapon.

"Don't start shooting!" said Garr quickly. "If you kill one of them, you will have to fight a thousand more. We don't want any trouble. Out the back way, men. By the time they break the door down, we'll be gone."

The two thugs were already slipping out the back. Garr shoved Lucy and me after them. The back exit led to a winding stairway that circled the elevators. Before he started down the stairs, the scar-faced thug went directly to a window and looked out. One glance and he dodged away from the window.

"Cops outside, too, boss," he said to Garr. "Four or five of 'em waitin' in the street."

Zorn went to the window and looked out. Without a second's hesitation, he raised that Buck Rogers pistol.

Garr jerked his arm aside.

"You fool! Didn't I tell you not to shoot?"

Zorn shrugged. "What are the lives of a few police?"

"It isn't their lives that matter, it's the fact that if you shoot one of them you will have to fight the whole force!"

"So what?" the Rmoahal questioned. "We must reach that time machine. Delay is dangerous." For some reason, he was in a big hurry to get back to Emerson's laboratory. And he was not willing to argue about the matter. "Either show me how to evade those police or I'll shoot my way through them."

He wasn't boasting or bragging. His manner showed that in his opinion he was stating a simple fact. Zorn was certain he could destroy all the cops that barred his way.

"I've got it!" Garr exclaimed. "We'll take the freight elevator down and go

out through the sub-basement. They won't be watching for us there."

Under Chicago, and under every other large city, is a world about which most people know nothing. There is a maze of connecting tunnels, steam lines, tunnels for cable and telephone lines, all supplying the skyscrapers. And the foundations of the buildings themselves go deep into the ground. It was through these tunnels that Garr proposed we escape.

The freight elevator took us to the basement. Once there, Garr seemed to know his way perfectly. If he didn't, his scar-faced henchman did. We went through two sub-basements, then through a small door that opened into a tunnel that was unlighted but which was apparently used to provide a passage for steam pipes. I know there were pipes in the tunnel because I bumped my head on one. The passage was big enough for a man to walk if he bent over. It wasn't big enough for Zorn. He had to crawl. As I fumbled my way forward, I could hear him scuffling along behind us. He wasn't a good crawler. He wasn't keeping up with us.

I didn't really plan to escape. I had no hope of getting away, until my hand, reaching for the wall on my left, suddenly touched nothing. I couldn't see it but I knew what it was—a tunnel branching off. To step into that tunnel, and to guide Lucy into it after me, took only a second. There wasn't a ray of light in the place. Garr and Zorn would think we were still ahead of them. The two thugs who were leading the way would think we were behind them. They wouldn't know we weren't with them until they emerged into the light and could count noses. I pressed myself against the wall of the branching tunnel and held my breath. I could feel Lucy trembling as she stood close beside me. My heart was jumping as

if it would tear itself out of my chest.

Would Zorn and Garr discover that we were missing? Or would they pass on by?

"DAMN it!" I heard Garr swear as he bumped his head against a steam pipe.

"Foul business, this crawling like a worm," Zorn grumbled.

Lucy was clinging to me, her fingers digging into my arm.

"How much farther do we have to go?" the Rmoahal muttered.

"Not much farther," Garr answered. "Damn those steam pipes to hell! I bumped my head again."

I heard him shuffle past the opening. Then Zorn, cursing under his breath, went crawling by. The sounds they made died away into the distance, and I dared to breathe! We had given them the slip!

"Come on," I whispered to Lucy.

It was the work of seconds to return to the main tunnel and go back the way we had come. Escaping from Garr and Zorn was as simple as that! Lucy seemed to think it was more than that.

"That was fast thinking, Don," she whispered breathlessly.

"Any idiot could have crossed them up in the dark," I answered.

"But only one person in a thousand would have had the courage to try it," she answered. "What if they had caught you trying to escape?"

I shuddered. When you stick your neck out and gamble with your life, it is only afterward that you think of the risk you have run. "We're not out yet," I said.

But we were out. Not five minutes later, after climbing up through the sub-basements, we reached the first floor—and ran straight into two cops. Never before in my life had a blue uniform looked so good to me. But apparently

we didn't look so good to the cops. They stared suspiciously at us.

"What are you doing here, buddy?"

"Where did you come from anyhow?"

"What were you two doing down in that basement?"

They fired questions at us and we tried to answer them, but without any noticeable success. We would probably have been arguing yet with those cops if the front door hadn't opened. A familiar figure entered. It was Doug Rommer. He took the cops off us and the way he did it made me start asking questions.

"Doug—these police—they arrived at a mighty handy time. Did you have anything to do with it?"

"Well, yes," he grinned. "When you didn't come out of that lab as soon as I thought you should, I went gum-shoeing around. When that black devil herded you and Lucy—I mean Miss Trent—out the back way, I followed along. It looked like an abduction to me, and while I wasn't worried about you, I was concerned about Miss Trent. So I called the police. Don," his eyes dug mercilessly into me, "what makes here? Who is that black giant? What's Garr up to now? Make with the information, my friend, and don't try to tell me you can't talk! You *have* to talk."

His voice was grim and hard, but that was not the reason I talked. Garr didn't know it but he no longer had his hold on me. Even if he had, now that I knew what he was trying to do, I would have talked.

Rommer listened quietly. When I told him about the Rmoahal and the time machine, he obviously didn't believe me. But Lucy backed up my story and Rommer eventually quit shaking his head and began to nod agreement. When I told him where Garr and Rommer could be found, he stopped nodding and started acting. Within the

space of an hour we were back on the quiet side street where Emerson's laboratory was located.

IN the darkness around us, forming a complete cordon circling the whole block and cutting off escape in every direction, were at least two hundred police. Rommer was having an argument with a police captain by the name of Kelly.

"I'll go in and tell them we have the place surrounded and all they can do is surrender," Rommer was saying.

"You will do nothing of the kind," Captain Kelly answered. "May I remind you, sir, that although you are a private detective, you are also a private citizen?"

"So what?"

"So you are staying here. Requesting the surrender of the men in that laboratory is the duty of the police force."

"But, damn it, sir—"

"There is no argument, Mr. Rommer. If I let you attempt to arrest these men and you get yourself killed, I shall have to answer to the commissioner, the newspapers, and my own conscience. This is my job, Mr. Rommer. You have done your duty in calling it to my attention."

I liked Captain Kelly. I liked the way he walked when he started down the passage that led beside the old house and to the lab at the rear. I liked the way several dark figures tried to follow him and the way he told them to get under cover and stay under cover. I learned later that Kelly had been a marine. He lived up to the finest traditions of that service when he walked up to the lab door, rapped on it, and called on Garr and Zorn to surrender. He had no choice but to ask them to surrender. Legally, they were not convicted criminals, and while Zorn would certainly

be charged with Emerson's murder, the police as yet had no evidence to prove him guilty of it.

Kelly died in the finest traditions of marine service, too. He rapped on the door. Lights were burning in the lab and I could see shadows moving against the windows. When Kelly rapped, the shadows stopped moving. Abruptly the lights went out.

"Open up!" Kelly said.

There was a moment of silence. It was broken by a fluttering whisper that came from within the lab. It was a sibilant, *hush-hush-hush* sound. Zorn's Buck Rogers pistol!

A street light cast a wan illumination back through the passageway to the lab door. When the *hush-hush-hush* whisper started, the door seemed to leap from its hinges. I couldn't see exactly what happened but I had the impression the door was jumping in one direction and then, suddenly reversing itself, was jumping in the other direction. It seemed to be shaking back and forth in a furious vibration.

Kelly tried to draw his gun. He didn't get it out of its holster. The vibration hit him too.

His body suddenly took on weird, crazy extensions. It vibrated, like the door. It seemed to expand and shrink, and bulge out like a suddenly inflated balloon, then collapse like a balloon that has been punctured.

Kelly screamed. He tried to drag himself to one side, he tried to shoot. The scream went into sudden silence. Like a tin can hurled along the ground by successive hits from the gun of an expert marksman, he was flung backward. The whole narrow passageway was alive with the vibrations of the power force spurting from Zorn's weapon. Rommer leaped back and I jerked Lucy out of range. Across the street, in the line of fire, a concrete post

supporting a street light was vibrating. It went down with a crash. The wall of the building across the street began the same horrible jerking, then exploded outward in a rain of falling brick. I don't know how much farther the vibration would have gone if Zorn had not turned off his weapon. The soft fluttery *hush-hush-hush* died out!

IN the heavy silence that fell, you could feel anger rising. There were at least two hundred cops in this area. I could hear them start talking to each other, in short, jerky sentences.

"Got Kelly!

"The cap got his!

"Captain Kelly is dead."

In the darkness, they were passing the word along.

"Kelly's dead!"

"Blasted him without giving him a chance!"

"What kind of a gun did they use on him anyhow? What was that *hush-hush-hush* noise? I never heard any gun that made a sound like that."

"What the hell difference does it make what kind of a gun they used? Kelly is dead!"

I do not know whether Zorn thought the effect of his weapon would frighten the police away. He might have thought it would have this effect. Possibly, if no one had been killed, the police would have hesitated a long time before they went into action. But a police officer had died. Angry men were growling in the darkness.

They didn't growl long. They acted. The first shot smashed a pane of glass in the window of the laboratory. Within seconds a dozen pistols were firing into the building.

"Well, I guess that's that," Rommer said. "Personally I would have liked to take that giant alive."

"I suppose you wanted him for a

pet," I said.

"Well, hardly," Rommer grinned. "But what a story he could tell, if we could get him to talk!"

"He isn't dead yet," I answered. The fluttery *hush-hush-hush* sound was coming from the lab. Zorn was fighting back!

There was power in that gun of his, power to burn! * Apparently he turned it on full force. A thousand pound bomb would not have caused more destruction. On the left was a vacant building. Two cops were shooting from the second story down into the lab. Zorn turned the gun on the building. Ten seconds later it was a pile of rubbish. It was literally wrenched to bits. The terrible vibration seemed to tear every brick from its resting place.

Somewhere in that pile of rubbish one of the cops was screaming. The gun fluttered again. The scream went into silence.

The cordon of police drew back then. We drew back with them. We didn't go away and neither did the police. But we pulled back out of danger. I remember hearing a burly captain talking over the radio in one of the squad cars.

"I want the riot squad," he was saying. "I want the reserves. I want every available man on the force. I want machine guns, tear gas bombs. I want you to call the army and get permission to open up one of their warehouses. Pick up three or four trench mortars, with ammunition, and get them down here in no more than thirty minutes. What's that? We don't know

*Actually, this weapon distorted the very fabric of space itself. Space can with difficulty be defined in words, except to say that it is the nothingness which serves as the foundation of the universe. As Einstein has shown, it can be warped, distorted, stretched out of shape. When a particular region of space is distorted any object that occupies it will also be distorted. Thus Zorn's weapon, distorting space, produced the terrible twisting effect. —Ed.

how to operate trench mortars? You damned fool, don't you think any of the boys were in the army? I want men and guns and I want them right now!"

GARR had been right. He had said to Zorn, "If you shoot one of them, you will have to fight thousands!" He could have added that if you shoot thousands, you will have to fight millions! Zorn might kill Captain Kelly. He might blast to rubble and ruin all the buildings surrounding him. He might stand at bay for hours, and fight eventually to the death, but eventually he would certainly die. There were hundreds of very angry men in the darkness around him. Although we could not hear them, I knew that all over Chicago sirens were screaming as squad cars loaded with men raced to this place. If everything else failed, the trench mortars, operating from blocks away could lob shells into the lab and blow it, and everything in it, to bits.

Garr and Zorn were doomed!

"They ought to surrender," Rommer said. "They don't have a chance!"

Except for occasional desultory shots, the shooting had stopped. The police captains were holding their men well away from the laboratory. There was no point in attacking. To attempt a charge would only result in needless loss of life.

There was silence over the area. Zorn had stopped using his weapon. Neither he nor Garr gave any indication that they realized the size of the forces that were being marshalled against them. But I could imagine Garr going slowly crazy as he saw his dreams crumbling around him. He was one would-be dictator who would never get to first base. The silence was broken by a low hum coming from the laboratory.

"What's that?" I asked.

"They're using the time machine," Lucy answered. "That noise is a transformer hum that comes when the current is turned into the field coils."

"Why should they be using the time machine?" Rommer whispered.

"I don't know," she answered. "What—what's that?"

"My God, look!" Rommer gasped.

The whole side of the laboratory suddenly bulged outward. Something came out of the lab. The door had been quickly opened, and it leaped through the opening, as though seeking to escape. Since the door was not big enough for it, it enlarged the door by knocking down part of the wall.

The wan light dimly revealed it. Larger than an elephant, a long neck ending in a mouth studded with huge teeth, it was one of the meat-eating dinosaurs. For a second it stood there beside the lab. Then, as though making up its mind, it lunged outward.

CHAPTER V

The Beasts of the Past

MADNESS stalked through the night. A dinosaur, a creature out of the Mesozoic Age, out of the dawn of time, was loose in Chicago. He surged out into the street. Water was still dripping from him, water that had come from some pre-historic swamp. He didn't know what had happened. His nervous system was slow and sluggish. His head was twisting around and he seemed to be snuffing the air. He sensed danger.

There was stillness in the city. The street had long since been blocked off, so no traffic was passing. The police were paralyzed. They would have faced death, they would have faced a band of gangsters, but would they face this? Voices began to speak.

"If you love me, Cassidy, will you tell me if you see the same thing I think I see?"

"Is that damned thing real?"

"I've heard of pink elephants but—"

"Where in the hell did it come from?"

"I haven't had a drink, and yet I see something like *this*!"

Rommer saw what was going to happen. "Tell your men to withdraw still farther!" he hissed to the captain who had been talking over the radio to headquarters.

"H—huh?" the captain gasped. "W—what is that thing?"

"It's a dinosaur!" Rommer snapped. "Pull your men back before a panic starts."

He was afraid the police force, suddenly confronted with this huge beast, would go into a panic.

"H—huh?" the captain grunted. "I don't get it. How would a dinosaur get here?"

A shot rang out.

Rommer suddenly cursed. "Back out of the way!" he snarled at Lucy and me.

Another shot echoed the first. Hell broke loose.

The beast screamed. The sound was a cross between a grunt and a gulp, ending in a high screech that was part hiss. It was a meat-eater, one of the carnivorous dinosaurs, and it saw meat. It went crazy. There was a group of cops in the middle of the street. It charged them. They emptied their guns at it. That huge mountain of beef and bone could absorb lead indefinitely. Pistol slugs would not stop it. Maybe an anti-tank gun would knock it down but there weren't any anti-tank guns here. The cops tried to run. The long neck snaked down, the fanged mouth opened. The beast actually bit the policeman into two pieces. It gulped at the pieces, swallowing them whole.

Then it started looking for more

meat. It was one huge gullet. Probably it had never had enough to eat in all its life. Certainly it had never found such excellent hunting. The two-legged beasts that screamed and ran before it, were toothsome bits. It gulped one down and started to hunt for more.

The police force would have faced anything else. They would face this, when they recovered from the first mad shock of panic. But the sight of the beast, its sudden appearance, the impossibility of such a monstrous animal being in Chicago, un-nerved them. They fled in helpless, blind panic.

THERE was another grumble from the transformers in the laboratory that housed the time machine. A second beast surged from the building. Unlike the first, this was one of the grass and vegetation eating dinosaurs. It was not interested in meat. But the police didn't know that. And if anything it was bigger than the first one. It was not trying to kill anyone. It was scared and all it was trying to do was escape, but the thunder of its feet, its high, shrill screams as it blindly sought to hide, were even more un-nerving than the actual deadliness of the meat eater.

In their efforts to run from the two dinosaurs and in their attempts to kill the beasts, the police forgot all about Garr and Zorn.

In a protected areaway, Rommer swore bitterly. "It's a ruse," he raged. "That damned giant deliberately used the time machine and brought those beasts here to distract the police so he and Garr would be able to escape!"

He stepped to the entrance, looked up and down the street. Sounds of furious battle filled the night, but no more dinosaurs had appeared. A squad car, abandoned by police who had tried

to run on foot, stood at the curb. Rommer walked out to it, opened the back door. He took out a tommy-gun.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

"I'm going to sneak up on those devils," he said. "And I'm not going to walk up to the front door and ask them to surrender. I'm going to slip up on the side, poke this thing through a window, and start shooting."

"But—" Lucy started to protest.

"Okay," I said. I walked out into the street. "Is there another gun in this car?"

There wasn't a second machine gun, but there was something almost as good—a sawed-off shotgun. I picked it up. In the darkness I was aware of Rommer's silent scrutiny.

"I said I was going to do the sneaking," he said.

"And I heard you," I answered. "Let's go."

He shrugged and started away. I looked over my shoulder at Lucy. "You stay here," I said.

Her voice was only a squeak but it was firm and determined. "I won't. I'm going with you." She sounded as if she meant it but I argued her out of it.

A couple of Comanches on a horse-stealing expedition would not have showed more caution in approaching their quarry than Rommer and I did in approaching that laboratory. Except for the throbbing of the transformer, which had died to a steady hum, there was not a sound from the building. Rommer looked in through a broken window.

"Damn it!" he said, and climbed inside.

The laboratory was empty. Garr and Zorn and Garr's two thugs were gone.

"They won't get far!" Rommer said bitterly. He took a pencil flashlight out of his pocket and flashed the beam

around. The lab was pretty badly messed up. The time machine was still running. While we were examining it, a step sounded in the room. Both of us jerked up our guns.

"Don't shoot," a girl's voice whispered.

"Lucy! I told you—" I gritted my teeth. I might have known she would not stay where she had been put.

"So they're gone," she said quietly. "I was afraid they would be."

"They won't get away," I promised her.

"I'm afraid they've already gotten away—to a place where they will be hard to find."

"What do you mean?" Rommer questioned.

"The time machine is still running," she said. "They've gone into time."

Rommer and I stared at each other in consternation. Both of us had assumed that Garr and Zorn had merely escaped from the lab and would try to hide somewhere in Chicago. Finding them in Chicago would not be hard. But to find them in time—to search for them somewhere in the vast infinity of time itself—

FROM the way Rommer and I looked at each, both of us knew the answer. No matter what the hazards, we had to follow Garr and the Rmoahal into time itself. Lucy seemed to guess what we were thinking.

"I'm going with you," she said firmly.

"Somebody has to stay here and watch the time machine," I said. "If it stops, we won't be able to get back. Since you know how it works, you will have to take care of this end."

"It will continue working," she answered. "We'll bring the police in, as a guard. Either I go with you, or I follow you. Is that clear?"

It was clear enough, and if it was unsatisfactory, there was nothing Rommer and I could do about it. We went looking for the police. They were already coming back, grim-faced men in blue. They had recovered from their panic.

"We got those damned beasts!" a sergeant said. "Grenades stopped them."

"Good," said Rommer. "Do you have any more grenades?"

"Plenty of them. Why?"

Rommer didn't answer but he helped himself to a couple of the little iron pineapples. We took the cops in the laboratory and told them what they were to do.

"If anyone except us comes out of this time machine, shoot first and ask questions afterwards" Rommer said.

"You can damned well bet we'll do that," the sergeant grimly answered. He disposed his men around the time machine until it was completely covered by a semi-circle of sub-machine guns. Anything that appeared there would receive a hot reception!

Lucy, meanwhile, had been making a careful inspection of the machine. Here, Rommer and I had to take a back seat. Neither of us knew the first principle about the thing. She checked every lead, every connection, to make certain nothing had been tampered with, crawling almost out of sight into the very heart of the device.

"This draws current from the city electric mains," she said to the police sergeant. "Under no circumstances is the current to be turned off until we return. This is of vital importance."

"We'll keep the juice running," the sergeant answered.

She looked at us. "We're ready to go."

The time machine in reality consisted of a maze of apparatus built

around a room about fifteen feet square. With the exception of a button on the floor, there was nothing in this room. One side was entirely open. The electric currents were concentrated within the square and anything within that square, depending on the actual setting of the machine, was sent into time. The machine itself did not move.

Lucy put her foot on the button set into the floor. "Ready?" she asked.

We nodded.

She pressed the button.

Somewhere in the laboratory a transformer grunted as it absorbed a sudden load. There was a click and a hum. Something that moved with incredible rapidity flashed before my eyes. I took a deep breath and unconsciously shut my eyes. Lucy and Rommer were standing beside me.

"When are we going to start?" I asked.

"We've already started—and arrived!" Lucy answered.

Emerson's laboratory was gone. The semi-circle of cops was gone. The maze of equipment surrounding us had changed. The huge electromagnets, the connecting cables had suddenly become stream-lined. The square cage had enlarged.

In the twinkling of an eye, uncounted milleniums of time had rolled past us.

WE were in what seemed to be a dome, a semi-spherical bubble similar to the dome of an observatory. It was made of some kind of glass that was so nearly perfect that you had to feel it before you were certain it was there. The dome was apparently located on top of a building or on a small hill, for we could look out and see miles in every direction. The view that met our eyes was startling.

Chicago was gone. Like mist before a rising wind, the great city had van-

ished. Lake Michigan was no more. There was not even a depression to show where the lake had been. As far as I could see, the land stretched away, and except where something had gouged out a hole, it was flat and lifeless. No vegetation grew anywhere, no trees, no shrubs, no grass.

I heard Rommer whisper. "What did we do—arrive in the middle of a desert?"

We had left Chicago in the night but we had arrived in the world of the Rmoahal in the daytime. The sun was overhead. It was shining down through a sky in which there was not a trace of a cloud.

Something had happened to the sun. It looked bigger, and instead of being a bright yellow, it was a dull red. It seemed to be almost heatless.

"I—I don't understand," Lucy whispered. "The Rmoahal came from the past, from the time of the mesohippus and the dinosaurs. The earth was a mass of swamps, then. It wasn't a desert—like this." Her eyes swept the horizon.

"Did we come to the wrong time?" She was talking to herself, trying to understand what had happened.

Something was wrong! That much was obvious.

"Maybe North America was a desert four million years in the past," I suggested. "In four million years a lot of changes would have taken place."

"That might be," she said doubtfully. She began to make a swift examination of the time machine that had been built into this dome of glass. "This is really a time machine," she said. "But—

"And we've come to the right place," Rommer interrupted. "Come here."

On one side of the room was an arched doorway. He was looking through it. As we approached, he mo-

tioned us to be quiet.

Beyond the arched opening, a sort of ramp led downward into another huge room. The place looked like a gigantic laboratory that also served as living quarters.

Garr and his two thugs were there! Surrounding them were twenty to thirty Rmoahals. Oddly, I noticed that a few of the Rmoahals seemed to be females. There were, also, two or three small ones that looked like children.

"It's a whole damned family of Rmoahals!" I whispered.

"That's what I think!" Rommer answered. "Either a family or a tribe. But what are they doing?"

Six or seven of the Rmoahals, including one that I recognized as Zorn, were standing around Garr. The others were frantically busy. They were carrying laboratory equipment, weapons, and something that I took to be food into what looked like a small sized dirigible balloon. It was an air-ship of some kind, and was apparently of an advanced design for it was tear-drop in shape and was perfectly stream-lined though it was without propellers or rudders. If it could be flown, it operated on some principle of which we knew nothing. I had a strong hunch that it would fly!

We watched them for several minutes. Garr and Zorn seemed to be having some kind of an argument but they were too far away for us to hear what they were saying.

"We've got to get closer," Rommer said. "We have to know what they are planning to do. Otherwise, we won't know what to do ourselves."

He knew and I knew that we were totally unprepared to cope with any situation that might arise. The Rmoahals, if they once suspected our presence, could blast us out of existence. When we had gone into time, we had

accepted the possibility that we would run into a situation that was beyond us. Our only hope had been that by stealth we might overcome Garr and the Rmoahals!

AT BEST, it was a dim hope. But both Rommer and I had flown too many planes into too many desperate battles ever to hesitate because we had only a slim chance of winning.

"I'm going to try to get closer," he said. "I think, once I get through this arch, I can hide behind the machinery in there and they won't see me. Since they aren't looking for me, I'll have an excellent chance of succeeding."

Good old Rommer! He didn't mind risking his life.

But I had a better plan.

"I'll go down and find out what's going on," I said.

"Why you?" he demanded.

"Because I can walk up to them without being in any danger!"

"Like hell you can!"

"Yes, I can," I insisted. "Remember, you once asked me what hold Garr had over me? Well, he doesn't have it any more, but he doesn't know that. I can go down to them and tell him that I came through the time machine to warn him that the police have the laboratory surrounded back in our time. He'll believe me. He thinks he controls me."

"Yeah?" Rommer's eyes drilled into me. "I hate to mention it, but how do I know he doesn't control you?"

Because he insisted on knowing, I told him about the scar-faced man. Until I had seen the man alive, I had thought I had killed him. Not two weeks after I had gone to work for Garr I had gotten tight, had gotten into a fight with the scar-faced man. When I recovered consciousness, I had found the scar-faced man dead. Garr

had told me I had killed him. To my dazed mind this had seemed possible. Garr had removed the body and afterwards he had held the murder over me, threatening to reveal the facts to the police if I disobeyed him. I told the whole story to Rommer. There was compassion on his face.

"I told you he was a blackmailer," he said. "He was blackmailing you all the time."

"I know it, now," I answered. "But he doesn't know I know it."

I handed my gun to Lucy and put two grenades in my pockets. She watched me get ready to leave and her soul was in her eyes. "Don—" she said. That was all she could say but I knew what she meant. She loved me. Now, that I knew I was not a murderer, I could tell her that I loved her. I hadn't been able to tell her before. But now I knew my hands were clean.

Rommer clapped me on the back. "Good luck, Don," he said huskily. "We'll hide out somewhere near this time machine and wait to see what happens."

The look in his eyes told me that he thought my life was not worth a plugged dime.

"Get out of sight, you two," I said. They scurried into a small alcove, the only possible hiding place.

"Mr. Garr!" I called at the top of my voice. "Mr. Garr. Where are you?"

I hoped there was frantic fear in my voice. Shouting for Garr as loud as I could, I ran into the arch. From the group below, a half dozen of the Buck Rogers pistols were instantly centered on me.

"Don't shoot!" I shouted frantically. "Don't let them shoot, Mr. Garr—"

"Kelsey!" Garr shouted, recognizing me. "Where the devil did you come from?"

"Don't shoot!" I gasped. I was putting on an act, the biggest act I had ever put on in my life. With my hands held over my head, I trotted down the ramp.

"Mr. Garr! Where am I? Where is this place?"

Zorn and his fellow Rmoahals were regarding me calmly. Too calmly, I thought.

"I got lost in the tunnels under the sub-basement," I said. "When I got out I couldn't find you anywhere. I went to Emerson's laboratory. Mr. Garr, what were those horrible beasts I saw? What—what's happened? After the police were scared away I went into the laboratory looking for you—"

GARR was paying very little attention to me and none at all to my story. His face had lost all trace of color. Sweat was oozing out of every pore. He was wearing a light-weight summer suit and it was soaked with perspiration. He turned his black eyes on me and looked at me and through me and scarcely saw me.

"W—what's wrong?" I gasped.

The scar-faced thug that I was supposed to have murdered was standing at one side. He and his companion were standing very straight, their arms stiff at their sides. They were looking straight ahead in a way that I recognized. I have seen prisoners of war stand like that.

"W—what is it, Mr. Garr?" I whispered.

"Shut up!" he said.

"But—"

"I said to shut up!" he snapped.

Not until then did I realize that the Rmoahals surrounding us were covering him with the pistols that produced the terrible twisting death! Garr turned back to them and continued an argu-

ment that I had interrupted.

"But you can't do this," he protested. "Even if you did deceive me, even if you are not Rmoahals, when you return to my time-world you will need my help."

I listened in stupefied astonishment. Garr had said these black giants were not Rmoahals! What did he mean?

Zorn laughed. "Why should we need you?" he asked. "You have no power, you have no influence. The police of your own people are seeking you. No, we do not need you. It is you who need us, you who planned to use us to establish your power over your race with our help."

"But—" Garr protested.

"I thought you were running from your own people," I blurted out to Zorn. He had said he was seeking safety from those who were trying to kill him. That was why he had gone into time.

He laughed. "So did Garr!" he said. His eyes mocked me. "When Garr first felt the telepathic impulses of my mind, he thought a member of some long dead race that he called the Rmoahals was contacting him. Since this worked out to our advantage, I did not correct him."

"Then if you aren't a Rmoahal, what are you?" I blurted out. "Did—didn't you come out of time?"

Zorn's laughter had all the hollowness of a drum beat. "Of course I came out of time," he said. "Garr thought I had come from four million years out of the past. I didn't. *I came from eight million years out of the future!*"

"The future—"

He laughed again. "Certainly. We are the last living inhabitants of earth. We landed here centuries ago, before the last of you humans left this planet. We came here from one of the stars, but when we landed, we found the planet provided inadequate resources to enable

us to repair and refuel our ship. Inasmuch as we could not get fuel elsewhere, we had no choice except to stay."

Zorn was giving me information in large doses. I had come here looking for information and I was getting it, though in larger quantities than my mind could easily absorb. It was not too difficult to imagine the possibility of space flight or to believe that Zorn and his race had come from the stars but it was with great difficulty that I could grasp what he meant when he said that the human race had left earth. Where had they gone?

"The ones that were still here, we exterminated," he said grimly. "The others had already gone to a planet called Venus, which is a much younger world than earth and is still capable of supporting life. Besides Venus is much closer to the sun and receives more heat than earth."

IT MADE me feel a little better to know that the human race had not perished. Out there somewhere in space on another planet, the race was fighting on!

"But what—what are you trying to do?" I whispered. "Why did you contact Garr, why did you go into time?"

"We are going back into time," Zorn said grimly. "This is a dead world, incapable of supporting life. Out there—" he gestured toward the windows—"the air is almost gone. Very little oxygen. No water remains on earth, no seas. There is so little air that winds do not blow. In this time your planet is dead. We are going back to a time when there were still water and oxygen on earth, when there was metal in the mountains, when vegetation and animal life were abundant. We are going into *your* time—" He looked meaningly at me. "There we shall find metals, oxygen, all we need. In that

time we shall also find a huge supply of laborers to serve us!"

I saw the whole picture, then. The world that we had seen from the dome that housed the time machine was earth, when the whole surface of the planet was a desert. Almost without air, entirely without water, earth was what the moon had been in my time, a dead, lifeless world floating in space, slowly circling a dying sun. Eight million years in the future—men had gone to Venus and a race of black giants from another star held the dead and lifeless husk of earth!

"We are provisioning a small ship," Zorn said, nodding toward the vessel. "We are going to take it through time. I think we shall find your time-world a very pleasant place indeed."

"You won't get away with it," I said huskily.

"Won't we?" he answered. "No doubt we shall find your police have laid an ambush for us. However, there are certain powers housed within our ship, certain weapons, that even your police force cannot overcome."

From the way he spoke, and the wolfish grin on his face, I did not doubt that he knew what he was talking about. When the ship went through time, it would meet a police ambush, but what chance would the police have against the weapons that Zorn possessed? What chance would an army have? Zorn's race, even this little colony, possessed tremendous scientific knowledge. No armies out of the past of earth could stand against them. The hordes of Genghis Khan were the mightiest fighting machine of their time. What chance would they have had against a Flying Fortress?

This ship was as far ahead of the Flying Fortress as the Fortress was ahead of the men of Genghis Khan!

"We'll give you what you want," I

protested. "You won't have to fight for it. We'll give you land for your people; metals, foods."

I was lying when I spoke. I knew the temper of my people. At the first sign of the aggressor—and Zorn would certainly be an aggressor—they would rise in arms. They might yield eventually, when the last man was dead.

"We take what we want," Zorn said. "Your race will serve us as slaves—nothing more."

Out of the infinity of time itself, a grim invader had come!

"But what about me?" Garr spoke. He had been a silent and wretched listener to our conversation. "I helped you. Without me, you would never have got a pole of your time machine built in our time. You owe me something for that."

"Yes," Zorn said thoughtfully. "Yes, we owe you something."

"You owe me everything," Garr blurted.

HE WAS one of the sickest-looking men I have ever seen. His dreams of conquest, of becoming another dictator, had turned into nightmares. Zorn would be the dictator! Zorn had used Garr as a tool, had made a fool of him. It was bitter medicine for Garr to swallow. The dog! Under other circumstances I would have enjoyed seeing him crawl. He had made me crawl often enough.

"Well, we shall pay you," Zorn said.

Garr looked a little relieved.

"What do you want?" Zorn said.

"We shall need someone to serve as an intermediary between us and your people. Would that position be suitable for your talents?"

"Yes!" Garr shouted. He began to thank Zorn profusely. I clinched my teeth. Garr would betray his race, he would become a sort of super-Quisling.

"I'll do anything I can to help you," Garr said. "Anything—Just tell me what it is and I will do it?"

"Good," Zorn answered calmly. The wolf grin appeared again on his face. "The first thing you can do for us—he brought up the pistol"—*is die!*"

A yellow pasty color appeared on Garr's face. "No!" he screamed. "No!"

The fluttery *hush-hush-hush* of the Buck Rogers pistol echoed through the air.

Garr's body jerked as the horrible vibration hit it. He screamed and the scream jerked into silence. Zorn calmly lowered the pistol.

"Garr would have betrayed us," he said. "*You! What are you doing?*"

He was speaking to me. I didn't bother to answer him. I was too busy. The attention of all the black giants was concentrated on what was happening to Garr. From the looks on their faces, they seemed to be relishing the sight. They weren't noticing me.

I pulled one of the grenades out of my pocket and tossed it straight through the open door of the ship!

I could have tossed it at Zorn. It would have got him, too. But he was not as important as that ship. Not a tenth as important. Without the ship, he and his people might go through time, but they would be without the power the vessel gave them. If I could smash the ship! If I could tear the guts out of it!

The grenade, if tossed against the walls of the hull, would have no more effect than a shell from a small cannon against the steel armor plate of a battle ship. But a grenade, in the magazine of a battle ship, could blow the mightiest dreadnaught to hell and gone.

"That's what I'm doing!" I yelled at Zorn.

The grenade arched through the open door. I heard it clang as it hit.

Blooie!

A thundering explosion seemed to split my ear-drums. A spout of fire leaped out of the open door of the ship. Tremendous thuds sounded within the vessel, secondary explosions that were taking place as the fire from the grenade was communicated to the fuel tanks or possibly to the driving machinery. As evidence of the fury of the blast, I remember seeing a black giant blown completely out of the door of the ship. Like a monstrous, wingless crow, he sailed through the air.

I had beaten Zorn to the draw. His ship was smashed!

I found myself looking into Zorn's face when the explosion took place. There was maniacal fury in his eyes. He was yanking the pistol up, pointing it at me.

MY TIME had come. I was looking at death. Well, I had looked at death before, a hundred times at least, in the seat of a fighter plane, but somehow or other the old man with the scythe had always passed me by. He wouldn't pass me by this time. I flung myself toward the floor, tried to drive in under the beam that would be released from the pistol. The gun followed my movements. I saw Zorn press the trigger.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat-tat—

It was not the *hush-hush-hush* flutter of the vibration pistol. It was an entirely different sound and one that I instantly recognized—the rattle of a machine gun. Somewhere near me singing bullets gouged grooves in the air.

Zorn's black face splashed with a sudden burst of red as that stream of bullets hit him. I have seen machine guns cut down small trees. This machine gun cut Zorn down. It blasted holes in his chest, his neck, his head. All at once a dozen fountains seemed

to spurt blood all over his body. For a second he stood erect, feet planted wide apart, straining suddenly sightless eyes trying to see where this totally unexpected deluge of death had come from. Then life went out of him and he fell with a sodden crunch.

I was on the floor. I rolled over and sat up. If Zorn had been surprised by this machine gun suddenly going into action, so had I. Then I saw the machine gun, and yelled at the top of my voice.

Doug Rommer was kneeling in the archway that led upward to the rounded dome. He was holding a sub-machine gun against his shoulder, shooting down.

"Give 'em hell, Rommer!" I yelled.

That was twice he had saved my life! This time, I got a chance to pay him back. There weren't many of the giants but any was too many. Rommer was shooting down on them. Off to one side I saw one bring up the terrible vibration pistol. I hurled the second grenade.

Even then I knew we didn't have a chance. There were only two of us. So far, surprise had fought on our side. But surprise was no longer helping us. One of those star-roving giants was more than a match for the both of us. Rommer had killed four or five of them. The sudden blasting fury of his attack had disorganized them. But they wouldn't be disorganized long.

I saw Rommer press the trigger of his machine gun. It failed to fire. He had emptied the magazine. I saw him glance back over his shoulder.

"Run!" I yelled at him. "Get away."

"Run, hell!" he shouted back at me. "This is no time to run. Look what's coming!"

He calmly picked up the gun I had left with him and started shooting.

I saw them coming! Blue-coated figures, dozens of them, as fast as they could run. They were springing out of

the time machine. I saw what they were bringing with them and I rolled as fast I could to the side of the room and took cover behind some kind of a machine.

The trench mortars began to let go. That was what the cops were bringing—mortars. Vaguely I remembered having heard a police captain tell one of his men to break into an armory and get a supply of mortars. The little weapons had arrived. From the arched doorway the police could toss the shells down into the vast room. How they did toss them down! Captain Kelly, if he had been alive, would have been proud of the way they handled those terrible little guns. They poured a torrent of shells into the room. The door of the ship was still open. They got the exact range on that—and poured shell after shell inside the vessel. Remembering what had happened to Captain Kelly, they didn't stop as long as a single giant remained alive. This was something a little worse than a den of rattle-snakes, and the police were cleaning it up.

When the explosion of the last shell had died into silence, I crawled out into the open. Rommer, his eternal grin still on his face, came down the ramp to meet me.

"Where did all the cops come from?" I demanded.

"I sent the boss after them," he answered.

"The boss—"

"Yeah. Lucy. She happens to be my boss. As soon as you got down here and I could see what was happening, I sent Lucky back through time after the cops. It looked to me like this menace had to be stopped here, and I thought we might need the police to help out."

He was right about that. Rommer was usually right. "How does Lucy happen to be your boss?" I demanded.

"She hired me," he grinned. "She said Garr had some kind of a hold over you and that you wouldn't ask her to marry you until you were free. So she hired me to—but here she is. She can tell you about it herself."

Lucy was coming running down the ramp. She flung herself into my arms. "Don, are you all right? There's blood on your face, Don! Are you hurt?"

"It's nothing but a scratch," I answered. "But listen, young lady, I want the straight of this. Rommer says you hired him to free me from Garr because you thought I wouldn't ask you to marry me until I was free from Garr. What I want to know, is Rommer telling the truth?"

She blushed shyly. "You wouldn't think Doug Rommer would lie, would you?" she said.

« « SHOOTING STARS » »

DID you ever stop to wonder how many shooting stars hit our earth each day? After years of studying meteors and shooting stars that flare into shining brilliance when they strike the earth's atmosphere and burn themselves up, it is computed that 300,000 shooting stars as brilliant as the bright star Vega strike the earth's atmosphere every day. From studies and observation of other meteors the following facts have been ascertained:

That: At the present rate of fall of meteoric material, less than an inch would have been placed on the surface of the earth in the 2,000,000,000 years the earth is known to have existed.

That: About 24,000,000 meteors strike the earth each day which are bright enough to be seen with the naked eye. The amount would be increased by millions with a telescope.

That: About 130 meteors flaming as brightly as the full moon should be seen from a single spot on the earth's surface during one year. Six of the 130 should be of the type which detonate.

That: The fear of a giant meteor, weighing tons, striking the earth is almost negligible, for only about one meteor weighing 35 tons should hit the earth in 300 years.—Donald Augury.



by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

**Tod Barnes had heard of the 'spirit' in the bottle,
but this was the first time he'd actually seen it!**

"SOMETHING wrong, buddy?" demanded a thin, piping voice, barely audible above the din.

The husky young man with the curly brown hair turned in his chair, scowling at the intrusion. But—

There was no one near him!

The brawny one reached up a some-

what unsteady hand and settled his greasy cap more firmly on the back of the kinky thatch which crowned his head. He had been sitting alone at a table in the farthest corner of *Mike's Elite Bar & Grill*, paying no heed whatever to the rowdy entertainment provided for a noisy Saturday night crowd.



The bottle imp stood watching with great interest

His garb itself set him apart from the revelers, for even in the most proletarian of saloons it is the custom to "dress up" for weekend dates. Yet he still was wearing his work clothes—heavy, battered safety shoes, baggy moleskin pants, gray shirt with the sleeves rolled up above his elbows, and—to top off his homely but likable features and mop of chestnut hair—the above-mentioned greasy cap.

Now, he carefully scrutinized everyone within possible speaking radius. No one gave any indication of being aware of his existence, however, let alone speaking to him.

Deciding at last that his ears had been in error, the solitary one again slumped over the table. He stared moodily into the amber depths of a quart bottle of paint remover, erroneously labeled whiskey. Old Harbor Light whiskey. Slowly, mournfully, he shook his head and sighed.

A lone tear welled up in his right eye and overflowed down his stubble-covered cheek, rippling from whisker to whisker. It reached his chin. There, for a moment, it hung suspended. Then gravity won and it plummeted to the scarred table-top: *splat!*

"Hey, you! Are you deaf?"

It was the voice again!

The young man's woeful but good-natured face betrayed bewilderment and a certain trace of panic. He stared about almost wildly, but still failed to locate the speaker. The bartender's dark warning came to mind: "You're three sheets t' the wind already, chum. Pour a quart o' *this* rotgut into your belly an' you'll be a cinch t' wake up in an alley with the screamin' mee-meas day after t'morrow." And then, philosophically: "But it's your stummick, not mine."

Was this, then, the beginning of the d.t.s?

"Here, stupid! Right in front of you! On the bottle!"

THE young man stared. His jaw dropped. He went as stiff and incredulous as if he had just swallowed a bumble bee. His eyes bugged out.

There, on top of the Old Harbor Light bottle, sat a figure—surely the most remarkable figure he had ever seen!

"Well, quit gaping, dopey. Or does your mouth grow that way?"

Still the other stared in complete and horrified fascination at the little individual perched atop the bottle. The strange creature stood not more than six inches high. He was, in most respects, a truly striking miniature of Satan himself, for a wicked-looking pair of horns and a viciously-barbed tail were among his accouterments. His face, however, was beardless. And, from stem to stern, he was a whiskey-amber color instead of the devil's proverbial red.

"All right, all right. So now you've seen me. Quit staring!"

Mopping off his sweat-beaded forehead with a bare and brawny forearm, the young man disregarded the command. Instead, he hunched forward in his seat and peered at his visitor from all angles.

"Am I crazy?" he demanded at last, in a voice that trembled slightly, "or is it just that I should take the pledge?"

The face of the creature on the bottle contorted in an exasperated grimace. "Oh, forget it. You'll get used to me. Now hurry up and tell me what's wrong. What's a man your age crying for?"

The strange apparition's words brought the husky youth's mind back to his own troubles. His underlip quivered. Big tears again filled his eyes. He started to swallow. Then, remembering that he had a lip-full of snuff, he

thought better of it and, instead, spat a stream of Copenhagen juice straight from where he sat into a gaboon some ten feet away with deadly accuracy.

His pygmy companion whistled. It sounded like one of the higher squeaks of a violin's E-string. "Some shot!" he congratulated.

But the husky one wasn't listening. He continued to stare straight at the spittoon. And two large tears were careening down his cheeks.

"I promised *her* I'd never take another chew of snuff!" he blurted in moist misery. "I swore I'd lay off the booze. But here I am." For a moment it looked as though he were going to break down completely and sob aloud.

"Oh, for Pete's sake! No one's that bad off. What's the trouble?"

There was a note of irritation in the queer Lilliputian's piping voice. The other caught it. His attention returned to his visitor. He studied the imp-like figure's features.

IT was a strange, wizened, little face, full of wrinkles and loose skin. But the thing you noticed was the eyes. They danced with mischievous light, like those of a merry elf. Yet, at the same time, there was a gleam of more wicked humor—as if here was an individual who didn't draw too fine a line between mischief and malice.

"Say, who are you?" the young man demanded, interested in spite of himself. He shoved his cap back even further on his head. "I never saw anyone like you before."

"Maybe you weren't looking very hard," came back the tart reply. "It certainly took you long enough to see me."

"But who are you?"

The tiny figure posed pompously on top of the Old Harbor Light cork.

"I'm a spirit!" he declared.

"A spirit!"

"Sure. A whiskey spirit."

The husky young gentleman eyed his visitor dubiously. "I don't get it," he mumbled.

"Oh, quit playing dumb. You're no sap. You've heard people call whiskey spirits before now."

The other scratched his tangled mop of chestnut hair and nodded slowly. "Yes, I've heard that. But that's different."

"Different, my eye!" snorted his Lilliputian companion in vast disgust. "The reason folks call whiskey spirits is because there're spirits in whiskey. And I'm one of 'em." He strutted a bit. "Why, spirits and bottles always have been connected. It's like Burke's 'Peerage,' sort of. Now take me, for instance. I can trace my ancestry straight back to the genii King Solomon imprisoned in bottles and threw into the sea."

The Old Harbor Light's owner considered this for a while. "How is it I've never seen one of you before, then?" he probed finally. "If there's one of you in every whiskey bottle, I should have met quite a crowd."

"Sure. You have," nodded the spirit. "You just didn't see us." He hesitated, groped for words. "You see, you can't see us spirits unless your brain is tuned just right. It takes a lot of alcohol to make you sensitive enough to recognize us. Only, when you *do* meet us, and then try to tell someone about it afterward, they just claim you were drunk." He shook his head in mild perturbation. "It's quite a problem, really."

The young man nodded with him. "Yes. I can see how it would be." A pause. "Say, what do they call you?"

"Beezlebub. It's a fine old name, too. Straight from the devil himself." The bright little eyes sparkled impishly. "Don't think they didn't have a

reason for calling me that, either. I can cause more trouble—"

At the mention of trouble, the other laughed harshly. "Trouble? Listen, little Beetlebug, or whatever your name is: I got more trouble right now than any ten spirits could cause in a thousand years."

"Oh, you think so, do you?" snapped Beezlebub peevishly, glaring up at him. "Well, I wouldn't be too sure of that if I was you. Why, I'll bet your troubles don't amount to—Say, just what is wrong with you?"

HIS brawny companion gulped hard. "Everything!" he confessed miserably, reaching for the Old Harbor Light and pouring himself half a tumbler of it.

"*Everything?*"

"Uh-huh. I lost my job. I lost my girl. I'm broke. Isn't that enough?"

The satanic little spirit eyed the mournful one with professional interest. "Let's try again. First, tell me who you are."

"My name's Tod Barnes. I work"—a melancholy amendment, followed by a stiff swallow of Old Harbor Light—"used to work, for the Griggs Tire Company."

"What happened?"

Tod glowered. "War. All the big wholesale tire dealers like Griggs have cut their payrolls 'way down." His jaw hardened. His brown eyes charred the table. "I got a raw deal, though. Old Griggs wouldn't just fire me like he did the rest of the boys. Oh, no. With me, he had to go through a lot of hocus-pocus and then end up by telling me he was firing me, only he might need me again, so he wouldn't give me a release so I could get another job."

"Hey, wait!" interrupted Beezlebub, looking puzzled. "What's this release business?"

Tod spat another stream of juice neatly into the spittoon, followed it with another gulp of whiskey, and then explained.

"It's a system they've dreamed up since defense came in," he said. "In a lot of places, they won't give you a job unless the last place you worked will give you a release form. That's all right. They do it so one defense plant can't steal workers from another. Only with Griggs"—he snorted angrily—"the only reason I can't get a release is because I'm the best tire warehouseman around here, and he wants to keep me so I'll always be available for work for him. Damn him!"

The amber-hued spirit sat down on the cork again, chin cupped in hands, and studied Tod. He noted the stocky, powerful build; the muscular forearms displayed by the rolled-up sleeves; the broad, strong hands, calloused with years of hard work.

"There's a war on, isn't there?" he demanded finally, his thin, squeaky voice barely audible in the barroom's tumult. "If you can't get a job, why don't you join the army?"

The young man shook his head sadly. "Think I didn't try, little fella? But I've got a bad leg; something's wrong with the joint, and it buckles under me every once in a while. So the army won't have anything to do with me." He sighed heavily. "Gee! If only I *could* get in the army! Maybe then Molly'd forget about that rat she ditched me for!"

"Molly?" The creature on the bottle showed renewed interest. "Who's she?"

"Ah!" Tod drew an ecstatic breath. "Honest, Beezlebub, she's the swellest girl you ever saw. Dark red hair. Gray eyes. The best figure between here and New Orleans.

"And nice! Say, you never would believe anyone could be so sweet. Of course"—he chuckled wistfully—, "she's got a whale of a temper, but I like a girl with a little life to her."

"So she ran out on you!" jibed Beezelebob.

THE spark of cheer that had come into Tod's eyes at the mention of Molly Shannahan promptly went out. His face again grew long.

"It wasn't her fault," he defended gloomily. "Everything was all right 'til Walter Dale got a job at Griggs'. And, by way of explanation: "Molly works there too. She's old Jake Griggs' private secretary." Then, resuming the original thread: "Anyhow, this Dale guy got a job there. He's one of these office lounge lizards—yellow hair, blue eyes, smooth line, all the trimmings. Molly didn't give him any play at all, at first. But then he joined the army, and I couldn't get in, and since then she's really been going for him." His face twisted in an unpleasant manner. "That rat! I'd like to wring his neck! Why'd they have to station him so near here, where he could get back to see Molly every weekend?"

Beezelebob snickered, while Tod spat again toward the cuspidor. As usual, the young warehouseman's aim was true, but this time he hung his head guiltily.

"Molly wouldn't let me chew snuff," he explained for the second time. "She said it was a disgusting habit."

The tiny figure on the bottle grinned wickedly. "So that's what you call trouble!" he jeered. "Say, you're getting off easy. You can't complain."

"I don't see what else could happen to me," snapped Tod, glaring at him and taking another slug of the fast-diminishing quart of Old Harbor Light. "I could be dead, I suppose, but that

wouldn't worry me. It'd almost be a relief."

Again Beezelebob snickered. "That's what you think. I could make you so miserable—"

The somewhat bleary-eyed young Mr. Barnes made an impatient gesture. "Oh, shut up! I'm tired of listening to your bragging. I couldn't be any worse off if the black curse of Don-negal was on my head."

Unpleasant fire flashed in Beezelebob's tiny eyes. His piping voice jumped another octave higher in irritation.

"So you want a demonstration, do you!" he cried angrily. "Well, I'll show you whether I can make people miserable or not. I'll show you!"

Even as he spoke, he sprang down from the bottle and sprinted across the table toward Tod. Before that somewhat befuddled young man could realize what was happening, the whiskey spirit had jumped into his lap.

"Take that!" raged Beezelebob, unleashing a terrific haymaker straight for the pit of the brawny warehouseman's stomach.

"Oh-h-h!" gasped Tod, starting to his feet as symptoms flashed across his brain with fiendish clarity. "Uillupp!" He lunged across the crowded floor toward the door at the rear marked "MEN."

"Call me a liar, will you?" fumed a thin voice in his ear. "I'll show you what trouble is!"

THE next instant some invisible object hooked Tod's right ankle as neatly as any lariat. He careened sideways across the room in a headlong fall. Then his shoulder hit the bar. The shock of the blow knocked loose his last vestige of self-control. Vaguely he saw the man towering above him beside the bar, and tried to turn away

his own head. But too late!

"Ulluppl!"

"Why, you drunken scum!" bel-lowed the strange man. "All over my new pants!" A hand the size of a small suitcase caught Tod by the nape of the neck and jerked him erect. "I'll teach you! When I get through with you, you won't be able to take a drink for a month."

Then a fist—twin of the one which had yanked him to his feet—exploded in Tod's face in spite of all his efforts to dodge it. He felt himself sailing through the air like a paper glider. And, through it all, a piping voice reiterated: "So you've got a monopoly on trouble, have you? Well, Mister Tod Barnes, just wait' til I'm finished!"

But Tod hadn't spent five years in the rough, tough school of warehousing for nothing. Even in the brief instant between the time his feet left the floor under the impetus of the big stranger's blow, and the moment his head crashed into the opposite wall at the end of his fist-powered flight, he somehow regained control of his arms and legs. With a wild war-whoop, he charged back across the room, fists driving like pistons. In a matter of seconds he and his adversary were rolling about on the floor in savage embrace, cheered on to battle by the enthusiastic shouts of the gentlemanly and ladylike patrons of *Mike's Elite Bar & Grill*.

"Jiggers! De cops!"

Tod staggered clear of his opponent just in time to see one of the last of the customers head for the window with his—Tod's—bottle of Old Harbor Light.

"No you don't!" roared the embattled warehouseman, lunging after the thief. His quarry promptly hurled back the bottle. It caught Tod square in the chest. For a moment he wobbled a bit. His hands, however, instinctively caught the missile before it could fall

to the floor. Then blue-coated figures were charging in through the front entrance.

Without waiting to inquire as to their object, Tod moved to a strategic position beneath the table in one of the booths which partially lined the bar-room. There he stared somewhat stupidly at the half-empty bottle of Old Harbor Light.

"Trouble!" he muttered. "Talk about trouble!"

SUDDENLY, as he gazed at the bottle, he remembered that he had no more money. That this was the last whiskey he was likely to get in a long time.

With a jerk he freed his belt from its loops. Pulling up one trouser-leg, he hastily strapped the bottle to his calf, praying the while that it would not make too noticeable a bulge. He had barely gotten the pant-leg readjusted when a nightstick nudged him firmly in the back and a bored voice suggested that he come out before he was knocked out.

His opponent, he discovered, already was in the hands of the law. Tod examined him with interest. He was taller than Tod by several inches, but built on the same burly plan. His black hair was slicked down as with shellac, and he wore what had obviously been an expensive suit previous to the evening's entertainment.

"O.K., you stiffs," said a patrolman, ignoring their protests. "Get moving. The wagon's outside."

It was as he climbed into the Black Maria that Tod caught the glimpse of Beezlebug's tiny amber form. The malicious little spirit was riding on his shoulder.

"Trouble?" jeered the imp at the same instant the young warehouseman sighted him. "Trouble? Buddy, I'm

not even started!"

And then, as Tod's hand descended in a vicious sideswipe, the queer creature was gone, leaving naught but an echo of mocking laughter behind him.

Beezlebub's ominous warning still was ringing through Tod's brain when, some 20 minutes later, he and his erstwhile opponent were shoved into the city jail's drunk tank. Heedless to the other occupants' hilarious greeting, the young warehouseman found himself a seat on a strap-iron bunk and meditated sourly on his situation. His companion, however, told all and sundry about their argument in belligerent tones, the while glaring threateningly at Mr. Barnes.

"Of all the damned fool stunts for me to pull, this was it," Tod muttered to himself. He took time out again to straighten his cap, and to scratch his head in perplexity. "Beezlebub was right. You always can have more trouble. And if Molly ever hears I got juggled for a drunk—"

Another voice interrupted this soliloquy.

"Chee!" it said pityingly. "An' youse look like a nice young guy, too!"

Tod glanced up. Before him stood the epitome of all bleary-eyed bums.

"I don't get it," the younger man commented a bit curtly. "You act like I was slated to walk the plank at dawn." The ludicrous aspect of the whole thing suddenly struck him. He managed a rather weak grin. "Cheer up, friend. They'll let me out in the morning."

THE bum shook his head sadly. "Oh, they'll let youse out, all right, all right. An' den what? The woiks!" More headshaking. "Chee! An' youse look like a nice—"

"Change the record," interrupted Tod. "I've heard this one before."

"Eh? What's dat?" The bum swayed to and fro like a sapling in a stiff breeze.

"But chee, bo, youse act like nuttin' had 'happened. An' youse as good as laid out on de slab at de morgue right now . . ." The pathos of the picture overwhelmed him. Two of the biggest tears ever to well from human optics rolled down his purple-blotched cheeks, realistic as any Hollywood glycerine imitation.

Tod felt the hair on the back of his neck rise in a wave of jitters. "What d'you mean, I'm as good as laid out at the morgue?" he demanded in a voice that croaked in spite of himself. He swabbed the sweat from his broad forehead with a somehow trembling hairy forearm. "There's nothing the matter with me—"

The bum wobbled closer and pawed consolingly at the brawny one's shoulder. "Sure, chum, dere's nuttin' de matter. Nuttin' a-tall. Oh, chee!" He burst out with a whole stream of alcoholic sobs.

"Hey, you rum-pot, what's wrong with you? You act like the world was coming to an end." He heaved the bum to a seat on the strap-iron cot. "Quit the bawling. I'm all right."

The other stared at him soddenly. "Doncha know, chum? Re'lly, doncha know?"

"Don't I know what? What the hell's wrong with you?" Irritation overwhelmed Tod. He shook the old bum vigorously.

"Doncha know who dat guy youse pushed around is?" Horror stalked through the rum-pot's burbling words. "Doncha? Hones?"

"No, I don't. And I don't care—"

"But Steve Kroloski, chum! Youse gotta care—"

"Steve Kroloski!" Tod's voice skittered about among the octaves like a 14-year-old's. He came half to his feet by sheer reflex. Every kinky hair on his head had gone stiff and straight, he

was convinced, and was standing on end. "Not Steve Kroloski!"

"His hoods'll knock youse off like *that!*" the bum assured him solemnly, trying unsuccessfully to snap his fingers. "Dat guy don' care who he bumps off. Youse'll walk outa de jail an' dere dey'll be. T'ree guys in a car. One drivin' an' two wid sawed-off shotguns. Chee!" He wept again. "Chee! An' youse is such a nice—"

But Tod was not listening. He was gulping like a fish out of water, instead, and he could feel a drop of icy sweat carving a channel down his backbone, and gathering momentum as it rolled. Without thinking, he crammed a chew of snuff into his lip.

A PIPING voice close to his ear said: "So! You wanted trouble, did you? Well, how'd you like this? I'll show you—"

"Beezlebub!" Tod jumped at the sound of the whiskey spirit's voice. Before he could turn his head, however, the little imp had jumped to his knee, there to continue to mock him.

"Beezlebub, please!" begged the burly warehouseman. "I take it all back. I'm sorry I ever said it. You *can* make trouble. You can make more trouble than anyone or anything in the whole world. Heaven help the U.S.A. if Hitler ever gets you on his side!" He shuddered slightly. "But please, Beezlebub, let's call it quits, with you the winner. This guy Kroloski doesn't play. He means business! He's the worst racketeer in the state. He'll have me bumped off for hitting him, like someone else would drink a glass of orange juice for breakfast."

A wicked leer contorted the spirit's wrinkled amber features. "Oh! So now you want to give up, do you?" he chortled. "Well, Mister Tod Barnes, you'll find I mean business, too. You

wanted trouble, and I'm going to give it to you. Try and make me stop! Just try—"

Tod's hand shot out, as if he were trying to catch an invisible fly. His fingers slapped shut. But the imp was uninjured. Indeed, he had sprung to a new place on top of the husky young warehouseman's knotted fist.

"Try to kill me, will you!" he screamed in his high-pitched voice. "I'll show you! Oh, just wait and see the trouble you'll get, now. Just wait and see!"

And, with a final defiant flourish of his barbed tail, he was gone, leaving behind him a quaking young gentleman who already could visualize relatives marching into the morgue with melancholy tread to identify the shot-riddled corpse of the late lamented Theodore Barnes.

Anxious minutes passed while Tod gnawed his nails down to the second knuckle. The nervous perspiration of the soap ads soaked his shirt. Once or twice he sneaked glances across the drunk tank to where burly, black-haired Steve Kroloski, king of the rackets, sat glaring at him. Tod felt his spirits drop to a new low. He was a normally courageous young man—maybe even a little more so than most. Certainly he was competent to take care of himself in most situations. But this—this was different. For Kroloski had a reputation for viciousness and cunning that was fast nearing the point where even the FBI would be interested.

"Pete O'Hare. Knifer Chinacka. Marty Sedgwick," muttered Tod, recalling the names of some of Kroloski's latest victims. It was an unpleasant thought; all of them had themselves been professional killers. It was a cinch they had been better prepared to defend themselves than he would be. But they were very dead indeed—all of

them. And, as a nicely sentimental gesture, one Steve Kroloski had sent flowers to the funeral of each.

"OH!" choked Tod. "Poor Molly . . . I'll never see her again." He ran nervous, muscular fingers through his kinky brown hair, spat a stream of Copenhagen juice into a distant corner with accustomed accuracy, and gave himself up rather completely to despair.

It was while lying in this black abyss of hopelessness that his subconscious picked up the unpleasant sound of Steve Kroloski's voice.

"Where the blank blank blank is that blank blanked mouthpiece of mine?" the racketeer fumed aloud, though addressing himself to no one in particular. "What's that blank blank blank mean, leaving me stuck in a blank blank stinking hole like this? What's he think I'm paying him for, blank his blank blanked hide? I'm no cheap hood, what's got to put up with this kind of thing!" Mr. Kroloski snorted with rage and such vehemence that Tod fully expected to see twin sets of steam pencil, dragon-like, from his ample nose. "Ah! What a hole! What a stinking, lousy, blank blanked hole! Damn! What I wouldn't give for a drink!"

"A drink!" choked Tod under his breath. The light of hope glowed suddenly in his eyes. "I got a drink. In fact, I got a whole half-bottle of 'em strapped to my leg"

Pulling himself to his feet before his nerve could ooze away, he crossed the tank with that peculiar loping gait so common to men who handle heavy weights. Before he had passed the half-way mark, Steve Kroloski was up.

"So help me, you come near me an' I'll tear you apart with me bare hands!" the racketeer grated, mayhem gleaming from both black eyes.

Tod gulped. "Look, Mister Kroloski, you don't understand," he answered with careful meekness. "I didn't mean to mess you up. It was an accident."

Kroloski's bull neck swelled. "Oh, tryin' to snake out of it now, are you?" he snarled. "A lot of good it'll do you, you blank blanked blank!"

"Please, Mister Kroloski!" Tod made placatory gestures, and with some difficulty swallowed the insults. He felt confident, in his own mind, that he could lick this thug any day of the week, outweighed and outreached though he was. But the specter of the racketeer's gunmen hung before his mind's eye to deter him from any notion of actual attack.

"Oh, shut up! Crawlin' on your belly ain't gonna help you now."

Again Tod swallowed a rising rage. "Didn't you say you wanted a drink, Mister Kroloski?"

"A drink? My God, yes! Have you got one? Where is it? Let me at it!" The racketeer clutched the husky young warehouseman and dragged him to a seat. A moment later he was gulping down Old Harbor Light as if it were water. Then, as it turned to liquid fire within him, the big gangster drew a deep breath, based apparently on some personal theory of air-cooling.

"What rotgut!" he choked. "But it's whiskey, and anything goes in this hole."

NOW, however, the other jail guests sighted the liquor. They swept forward like the tide coming in. Tod took a spraddle-legged stand between them and the racketeer.

"I'll slug the first one of you who comes any closer!" he declared grimly, working on the theory that this should go far toward clearing his record with the gangster. But he had underesti-

mated the lengths to which a rum-soaked stew-bum will go to get a drink.

"Whiskey!" The drunks chanted it as if the word were a battle cry. As one, they charged. The young warehouseman went down under a barrage of arms, legs, and breaths. He caught a glimpse of Kroloski swinging back the bottle as if it were a club.

But the next instant all hell broke loose. Drunks began staggering backward in all stages of confusion, bellowing epithets and stumbling over each other in a mad rush for anywhere but where they were.

Seconds passed while Tod sat scratching his curly thatch in stunned bewilderment at the exodus. Then he got the vaguest of flashes of an amber streak close on the trail of the last laggard.

"Beezlebub!"

Like magic the satanesque little figure appeared on his knee, barbed tail swishing wickedly. The tiny eyes sparkled with malicious joy.

"Brother," Tod declared with feeling, "that was a noble deed."

"Oh, it was noble, was it?" leered the whiskey-hued imp. "Well, just you wait and see how noble it was!"

The husky one felt a wave of misgiving dash over him. "What is this?" he demanded. "What d'you mean?"

"You wanted trouble, didn't you?"

Protestingly: "But I've had trouble. Too much trouble."

"Trouble? You don't know what it means, yet." Beezlebub snickered in his most devilish fashion. "But you will. That's why I got you out of this jam by driving away those drunks. I've got other plans for you." Another wicked laugh. "*Worse* plans!" And—like that—the tiny spirit was gone.

Beezlebub—"!"

"Hey, you off your bat?" interrupted the voice of Steve Kroloski. "What you talkin' to yourself for?"

Tod pulled himself mournfully to his feet. "One of those stiff must have landed a lucky punch," he explained, rubbing his jaw in rueful substantiation. "My head's still spinning."

The racketeer showed his tonsils in a guffaw. "That sure was a sight," he roared, slapping his thigh with one of the suitcase-model hands. "They was swarmin' all over you. But they sure went the other way when I swung that bottle." He extended the nearly empty Old Harbor Light flask to its owner. "Here, buddy. You better strap this back on your leg. We don't want no dumb screw takin' it away from us."

TOD was barely pulling down his pant-leg again when a guard appeared.

"Steve Kroloski!" he called. "Come on out."

The big gangster rose. "Ah!" he grunted. "So that blank blanked mouthpiece of mine finally got here." Then, turning to Tod: "What's your name, buddy?"

Crossing his fingers, the young warehouseman announced it. And added, under his breath: "I hope he isn't just lining up advance data for his bump-off squad."

A moment later the guard was back. "Theodore Barnes!"

In a matter of minutes, Tod found himself standing outside the jail, once more a free man. Steve Kroloski was beside him. The lawyer already was heading down the street.

"Gee, thanks a lot, Mister Kroloski," effused Tod. "I'd have been in that tank 'til Christmas, probably, if you hadn't gotten me out." He paused. Then: "Well, I guess I better be getting home now. So long!"

One of the big gangster's oversized hands promptly descended on his shoulder. "Hey, wait a minute, Barnes. You

ain't goin' no place."

Tod's heart stopped dead. Again he saw visions of lonely country roads, black touring cars, and leering trigger men.

"I like you," the racketeer continued, beaming. "You got nerve. I can use your kinda people. You come along with me and tell me all about you."

A few moments' meditation convinced Tod of the wisdom of agreement. In half an hour he and Kroloski were entering the latter's east-side headquarters.

"So old Jake Griggs gave you a raw deal, huh?" muttered the big thug. "Say, buddy, that's fine. I got just the job for you. You'll love it." He chuckled heavily.

"What is it?" There was a note of anxiety in the young warehouseman's voice. He couldn't forget Beezlebub's threat of more trouble to come. Somehow, he had a hunch that things were going too smoothly; that this, indeed, might be the beginning of the portended grief.

The racketeer grinned and slapped the other on the shoulder.

"It's a cinch!" he enthused. "A lead-pipe cinch. Old Griggs has got the biggest tire warehouse in the state. I been planning to knock it off tonight. With the rubber shortage there is, we can bootleg those non-skids for more money than there is in the mint." He guffawed. "If that isn't a good one! We'll have old Griggs' best warehouseman to play overseer while we hi-jack his tire vaults!"

TOD gulped. "Look, Steve," he pointed out, "robbing that tire warehouse is like trying to walk off with the Fort Knox gold. Old Jake Griggs isn't any sap. He's got that place so looped up with burglar alarms a rat couldn't get in. And to top it off, he sealed up

all the doors but one, and put a regular vault door in there, with a combination and everything. You wouldn't have a chance of getting in."

"Don't kid yourself, Barnes," advised the gangster. "You think we didn't finger that job? Everything's all taken care of. In another hour we'll have truck-loads of tires rolling out."

Tod breathed a silent prayer that the beads of sweat which he felt on his forehead didn't show. For the dozenth time he readjusted his cap and spat with deadly precision into the racketeer's waste-basket.

"Well, if everything's all set," he remarked in what he hoped was a casual tone, "then you won't need me along to help. So I'll be on my way home and get some sleep. It's nearly two a.m. now." Rising, he started for the door.

And, once again, Kroloski's big paw stopped him cold. He turned, and noted with nervous interest that a large automatic pistol had appeared in the gangster's other hand.

"Barnes," said Kroloski, "you're not goin' to disappoint me by turnin' out to be a blank blank yellow dog, are you?"

Licking his dry lips with a tongue that suddenly felt like a piece of old shoe leather, the young warehouseman eyed the gun thoughtfully.

"Why, no, of course I wouldn't disappoint you, Steve," he said at last.

Kroloski beamed. "I k new you wouldn't let me down!" he declared triumphantly. "We could do all right without you, but you might be quite a help if somethin' unexpected came up."

He walked over to a desk in one corner of the room and pressed a button. In a matter of seconds the door opened and several individuals who looked like gorillas or ex-cons, or both, came in. With them was another, taller figure, wearing a mask.

"Our finger man," Kroloski explained, gesturing toward him. "He don't like no one to see his mug." He nodded to two of the thugs. "You boys know what to do?"

"Sure thing, Steve. We got it down pat."

"O.K. On your way."

The two hoodlums stalked out.

Five minutes passed. Then Kroloski stuck the automatic into a shoulder holster. "That does it, boys," he declared. "Let's go."

TOGETHER, the men left the room and climbed into waiting cars. Tod noted uneasily that no chances were taken with him; always some of the thugs maneuvered themselves to cover him, and always their hands were stuck carelessly in their coat pockets. In the car, he found himself in the back seat, squeezed between two low-browed individuals.

"Well, well! So now you're a gangster. On your way to rob your old employer. Ha!"

The thin, piping voice sizzled through the brawny young warehouseman's brain like a hot knife through butter. He jumped in his seat. Instantly a hard object rammed into his ribs from either side.

"Just take it easy, Mister!" remarked the thug to his left.

"Yeah," agreed the gunsels on the right, digging him harder with the pistol barrel for emphasis, "if yuh wanta stay healthy, take it easy."

Tod took it easy.

"Won't you have a time explaining *this* to your Molly!" Beezlebub's voice plagued again. Tod could see the fiendish little fellow now; he had resumed his favorite pose on his tormentee's knee.

"You little devil!" Tod snarled. "Why can't you let me alone?"

"Trouble!" snickered Beezlebub. "More trouble than you ever dreamed of! Yes, sir, I'm outdoing myself." And then, very mysteriously: "But wait 'til you see what I've got fixed up to bring you and your Molly back together! Oh, you'll die!" His tail switched about in a spasm of glee. "Oh, you and Molly!"

"You leave Molly out of this!"

In spite of himself, Tod bellowed the command aloud. The next instant twin pistol-barrel blows knocked the wind out of him.

"Quit hollerin'!" advised the right-hand gunman.

"It ain't polite!" rejoined Number Two.

Their victim couldn't decide whether the sound he heard was the ringing of his own ears or the echo of Beezlebub's mocking laughter.

But not for long was the warehouseman left to the relative peace of his own bitter meditations on life in general, spirits in particular, and specifically Beezlebub. The car wheeled onto a familiar dead-end street and, in a moment, its occupants were hurrying toward the shadows that marked the Griggs Company's office entrance. The masked finger man led the way.

That made Tod frown some more. There was something vaguely familiar about that tall figure, but he could not quite place what it was.

"Inside!" barked Kroloski, prodding his men forward.

The masked man still leading, they went straight through the receiving and shipping departments to the big vault door old Jake Griggs had installed to protect his precious tires. There they paused while Big Steve consulted his watch.

"Two t'irty already," he grunted impatiently. "They oughta be here by now."

AS if in echo, a distant door slammed.

In a matter of seconds the two thugs he had sent out from his headquarters ahead of the rest came hurrying down the loading platform. Between them, half-dragged and half-carried along, was a slim, familiar figure.

"Molly!" exploded Tod.

The girl's head jerked up. "Tod!" she gasped. Then: "What are you doing here?"

Before the young warehouseman could open his mouth, Steve Kroloski cut in.

"This is our finger man, Miss Shannahan," he announced with more smoothness than it seemed possible he could assume. "He's the guy who figured out just how we could knock this place off. Now he's got cold feet, though. Seems like he's not as sore at his old boss as he thought he was." He laughed harshly. "He's a little late to come down with that Holy-Joe stuff, though. We're goin' through with the job." He bowed elaborately. "With your help, o' course."

"My help? What do you mean?"

Kroloski grinned evilly. "Your boyfriend, here, tipped us off that you was the only one besides Old Man Griggs who had the combination to this trick door. So you're goin' to open it. Why else did you think we got you out of bed in the middle of the night?"

"Tod Barnes, I hate you!" the girl flared, gray eyes flashing with anger. "Of all the cheap, contemptible tricks! I hope they throw you in jail for a hundred years—"

"Molly! He's lying! I never fingered this job—" The warehouseman struggled frantically against the grip of the two thugs who held his arms.

Kroloski's hand flashed out in a savage slap that sent Tod reeling. "Shut up, you punk! You were anxious

enough to get the dough for this job. Now quit tryin' to crawl out from under it." He turned to Molly Shannahan. "The guy's yella. The job was his idea, an' now he's scared stiff of it."

"That doesn't make any difference to me!" she snapped. "Just because he dirtied himself with a thing like this doesn't mean I'll help you." She was a proud little figure, standing slim and erect as a young gazelle. The gray eyes, burning with anger, almost seemed to match the glow of her auburn hair.

"Don't be a sap, sister. You'll help us. You're pretty, an' I bet you'd hate like hell to end up lookin' like some-thin' a bottle of acid had got at . . ." The gangster's voice trailed off to a threatening silence.

"I don't care. I won't unlock it."

Crack! Kroloski's open hand caught her full in the face with savage force.

"How about it, sister?"

"No!"

Crack!

"Stop it, you dirty dog!" Tod foamed. He hurled himself forward with all his might, tried to twist his arms free from the mobsters who held him. "Let her alone! I'll kill you—"

THE big gangster's black eyes glittered. He whipped out his automatic, slashed down with it across the young warehouseman's face. And, as Tod went limp: "Take him over there an' hang onto him. I got work to do."

So, for five interminable minutes, while Tod bit his lip 'til the blood ran, the racketeer "worked." At last even Molly's staunch Irish spirit could stand the torture no longer. The hoodlums who held her carried her—half-blind with pain—to the vault door. Seconds later it swung open.

Big Steve Kroloski nodded his satisfaction. "Nice. Now everything's set." He turned to one of his henchmen. "Get

movin'. Pull the trucks in as fast as you can." Then, wheeling to the thugs who held Tod: "Bring the dope into the vault. We'll tie him up 'til we get a chance to . . . take care of him."

They dragged the young warehouseman into the great, air-conditioned storage room, where monster stacks of defense-vital tires rose like columns clear to the roof.

"Remember how much trouble we were supposed to have with the burglar alarms?" Kroloski taunted Tod. He led the way to where half-a-dozen loops of wire—the bright copper of new connections glittering—protruded from a gash in the wall behind a stack of tires. "See? We just wired a new circuit around the door. It's a tricky business, but you can do it nice if you get inside help. An' that's what we had!"

A few feet farther on he halted in a corner.

"Tie him up!" he commanded.

One of the hoodlums produced a length of fishline. "They told me at the hardware this stuff'd take a hundred-pound pull," he commented as he began his work, "so six or eight turns oughta hold this bird like log chains."

Kroloski grinned. "Do a good job of it," he advised. "Then you stand guard on him."

Already the rumble of hand trucks was echoing through the warehouse. The big racketeer made a hasty check of Tod's bonds, then turned. "I gotta see they speed up the loadin'," he explained. "I'll be back soon."

THE concrete floor of the warehouse was cold and damp, and so were Tod's spirits. He lay where he had been dumped, in a sort of compromise between sitting up and lying down. This was brought about by the fact that his against the intersecting walls which joined to make the corner. All in all,

it was about as uncomfortable a position as a person could imagine, especially when wrists and ankles were bound.

"Well, well!" exclaimed a thin, piping voice. "Aren't you the pretty one, now!"

"You!"

"Sure," acknowledged Beezelebug brightly. "Me."

The young warehouseman peered about, only to discover in the end that the imp was perched in the middle of his chest.

"You little devil!" he raged under his breath, glaring down at the spirit the while. "If ever any living creature deserved murder—"

"Only, you can't kill me," retorted his tormenter with great good humor. "Remember? You've been trying to do something to me all night, and how far have you gotten? Here you are, trussed up like a Christmas goose, just waiting for these goons to take you out and shoot you. I've made you sick, had you thrown into jail, fixed it so you'd get pushed around by half the hoodlums in the county, and completed the arrangements for your execution. And you were the stupid oaf who said that nothing more could happen to him! That he'd seen all the trouble there was!" The tiny demon held its sides against the ravages of its spasms of laughter, while Tod mouthed incoherent oaths.

Recovering at last, the amber son of Satan went on: "Don't forget your girl, either!" he warned. "She's in a nice spot, too. I really got clever on that one. First I had Steve Kroloski decide it would be a good stunt to make you the goat for the whole deal. He figured the girl would tell the police you planned the robbery. With you dead, that'd leave the detectives at a dead end.

"Now, though, I've planted another

idea. I've got Mr. Kroloski to thinking that maybe he'd be safer if he didn't leave *any* witnesses. After all, you know, the girl might see his picture in the paper sometime and recognize it. So the girl's going to be killed, too. They won't bother to tell her you're innocent, though. She'll die, thinking you're the one behind it all."

"Damn you!" raved Tod. "If I had my hands free—"

"**B**UT you haven't!" Beezlebub pointed out gleefully. "See, you can't do a thing!" And with that, he jumped to a position on his helpless victim's nose, there to torment Tod by tickling the inside of his nostrils with the long, barbed tail.

"Ka-choo!"

The force of the sneeze sent the imp sailing through the air to a point near young Mr. Barnes' waist, but he bounced to his feet again like a rubber ball. And, when his victim's head snapped back against the wall with a *thwack*, the demon exploded into another gale of malicious merriment.

"See you later!" he shouted as he disappeared from view, leering unpleasantly. "I've got to run over to see how Miss Shannahan's execution is shaping up!"

The sound of the sneeze brought the gangster left to guard Tod back to attention.

"Catchin' cold?" he queried with mock solicitude. "Well, don't worry. You ain't gonna live long enOUGH fer it to grow into pneumonia."

Ablaze with inner fury though he was, the other did not answer. Instead, he strained his wrists against the fish-line, only to learn why it had been used. It was so small in diameter that it cut deep into his wrists long before stretching. He saw clearly that he had about as much chance of breaking loose from

it as he had of sinking through the concrete floor.

Time and again the events of the evening passed through his weary mind. A dozen questions arose to plague him: Who was the masked man who actually had arranged this robbery for Steve Kroloski? How did he know all the details of the warehouse protection plan? Would he get away with it? And what about himself, Tod Barnes? Did he have a chance to live through this strange, mixed-up phantasmagoria, in which one wicked little spirit maliciously determined the destinies of half-a-dozen people? Or would Beezlebub's queer, distorted pattern of behavior ultimately win out?

But most of all he thought about Molly. He traced and retraced her face in his memory. Sighed over every beloved feature. And cursed the luck that had brought her here, to play the pawn for Beezlebub.

The floor grew colder and colder beneath him, until at last his teeth began to chatter. He meditated on the bad luck that had led him to go out to drown his sorrows in Old Harbor Light in his work clothes, instead of going home to put on his warmer suit. He thought, wistfully, how good a drink would taste right now.

And then it came to him!

One second it was the vaguest of hazy ideas. The next a full-grown plan. It was completely crazy, of course. No normal human being, in a normal situation, could even have thought of it without laughing. As a matter of fact, and in spite of his present plight, Tod was inclined to smile now. And the more he considered it, the more sound and logical it seemed, and the more he smiled.

HIS guard was in the throes of a long monologue. Printed and bound, it

could well have been titled: "Rubbing 'Em Out—A Handbook of Techniques for the Modern Gangster."

"The general idea is that as soon as this warehouse is emptied, I get taken for a ride, huh?" probed Tod in a quavering voice.

"You hit it, chum. Now, I remember how we did it in t'irty-t'ree, to Lefty Alvarez—"

"Sure," agreed the prisoner, in what he hoped was a whining tone, "but what about me?"

"Well, w'at about it? You gets bumped, that's all."

The young warehouseman moaned experimentally. It was, he decided, quite a success.

"Look, friend," he pleaded, "in another couple of hours I'll be dead as last Friday's fish. But right now I'm cold and sick and miserable all around. How about giving me a drink? It won't hurt you, an' it sure will help me."

His guard considered this for a while. "Dat's oke wit' me," he reported finally, "only I ain't got no hootch on me."

Trying hard to keep the elation out of his voice, Tod moved on to the next step of his campaign. "Well, I have," he said. "It's in a bottle strapped to my left leg. I put it there when I saw they were going to haul me off to jail."

"Yeah? Let's see." Somewhat suspiciously, the gunman investigated, then began to chuckle. "Say, dat's clever," he announced with grudging admiration. "You're a smart guy." He inspected the label. "Old Harbor Light, huh? Gee, dat's rotten stuff."

Tod moaned again. "Sure," he agreed, "but at least it'll warm me up. Let me have a slug of it."

"I guess dat's all right," the hoodlum decided. He uncorked the Old Harbor Light, lifted the prisoner's head a little higher, and stuck the bottle neck into his mouth. Tod gulped one mouth-

ful of the liquid fire after another, until the last dregs gurgled.

"Hey!" protested his captor in an injured tone, "you don't hafta make a hog of yerself. I'd like a nip, too." Then, rising to his feet: "Didn' you leave none at all?"

But Tod was eyeing the thug in most peculiar fashion, almost as if measuring the hoodlum for a blow. The other did not notice it, for he was trying—unsuccessfully—to wean a drink from the bottle.

Tsspp!

Like a fire hose nozzle's initial blast, Old Harbor Light spurted from the young warehouseman's lips. Spurted in the same deadly-accurate fashion that Copenhagen juice had spurted a thousand times before. Spurted straight into the gangster's eyes!

"Aiii!" gasped the hood as the fiery stuff seared his optics delicate tissues. He staggered backward, his mouth open for a scream that never came.

FOR Tod's legs jerked spasmodically.

His feet slammed into the lurching gunman's ankles. The guard crashed to the concrete floor, his head striking with a sickening thud, while the Old Harbor Light bottle flew out of his hand and smashed into a hundred pieces on the pavement.

There was a long moment of silence. Tod listened breathlessly for the sound of approaching feet. But no one came.

Painfully, awkwardly, the young husky rolled across the floor to the remains of the bottle. There, with infinite patience and at the expense of several minor cuts, he hacked away at his bonds with the broken glass.

In five minutes he was free and pulling himself gingerly to his feet. Hastily tying up the still-unconscious thug and taking his gun, Tod hurried toward the warehouse entrance. Only once did he

pause: when he came abreast the re-circuited burglar alarm, he hesitated long enough to grin and—once again—to spit.

Hand-trucks were rumbling down the center aisle in a steady stream as sweating hoodlums rushed tires from the warehouse into waiting trucks. An unpleasant gleam lighted Tod's eyes as he took a firmer grip on the captured automatic.

"Now if only that damned Beezlebub doesn't stick his nose in again, we should have quite a party here," he muttered under his breath.

But before he could move, a little cry of terror caught his ear. It came from the far end of the warehouse. Tod spun about. Molly!

By craning his neck cautiously around a pile of tires, the young warehouseman could see the girl from where he stood. Her back was to him, and in front of her stood a gorilla-like thug who was in the act of screwing a silencer onto the end of his gun. And, because Molly was between him and the hood, Tod dared not shoot.

Stuffing the captured automatic into the waistband of his trousers, the brawny youth sped on silent feet through the next lane of tires toward the two.

"It's too bad, sister, but I gotta do it," he heard the gorilla say. "Don't worry, though; youse won't even feel it."

And Molly, with a toss of auburn curls: "Why apologize? Just go ahead and murder me!"

His heart in his mouth, Tod shivered at the situation. He could not get closer than ten feet to the gunman without being seen. Yet he dared not try shooting, for Molly still separated him from the thug.

Then, in a flash, he caught it. He remembered all the thousands of times

he had hurled tires into the air so accurately that they balanced on piles far higher than his head.

In an instant he had a relatively light automobile tire in his grasp. Already the hoodlum was raising his gun. Tod clenched his teeth. He tried desperately to halt the trembling of his hands.

"WELL, I *am* sorry," said the gorilla. His face was a trifle pale, as if murdering women in cold blood was not quite in his line. But his knuckle was whitening on the trigger.

Tod hurled the tire.

High into the air it spun, like a giant's toy. The gorilla caught the flash of the movement. His face went puzzled. He stood stiff-legged and tense, suspicious but not yet quite aware of what had happened.

Tod's lips were like chalk as he watched the paper-covered rubber ring reach the ceiling of its climb. Then it was dropping . . . dropping . . . dropping, straight down in a flat fall, as neatly as if its goal were a stack of tires instead of an armed and desperate killer.

Thunk!

As neatly as ever a rope ring dropped over a peg, the tire struck home—over the gangster's head and shoulders like a life preserver, a perfect hit. It slapped the man's arms tight against his sides, knocked the pistol from his grasp.

Even as it hit, the young warehouseman sprang. In three steps he covered the space between them. His calloused fist smashed home on the thug's chin with a force that sent a stab of shock running back into his own shoulder.

"Get him!"

It was the bellow of Steve Kroloski. Tod spun about. The big racketeer was charging toward him like a mad bull.

Tod whipped the automatic he had taken from his guard. With a single shove he sent Molly lurching back into the cover of two stacks of tires. He snapped a shot at Kroloski.

With amazing agility, the big gangster jumped sidewise. But still he came on.

Again the young warehouseman pulled the trigger. No shot! One glance told the story. The slide action was jammed back. There was no time to do anything about it. Snarling, he hurled it straight at the oncoming hoodlum with all his might.

"Cops!" a voice from the far end of the warehouse roared. "Cops! Carloads of 'em! Run for it, youse guys!"

Kroloski stopped in his tracks as cold as if he had been shot. Behind him, his gunsels already were sprinting for the exit. From outside came the thunder of guns.

"Steve! This way! Quick!"

As one, Kroloski and Tod whirled. The voice had come from the back of the warehouse. It was sharp, clear, incisive—everything that the butchered English of the gangsters was not. Somehow, it struck a familiar note in Tod's consciousness. Where had he heard that voice before?

There, far to the rear, stood the masked, mysterious figure of the finger man. He motioned frantically.

"Fire door!" he shouted. "It only opens from the inside! Hurry up!"

THE chatter of a tommy gun now joined the tumult outside the main entrance. Kroloski did not hesitate. He rushed headlong past Tod and toward the masked man.

In one jump the husky warehouseman was beside the fallen gorilla who had been scheduled as Molly's executioner. He grabbed the hoodlum's gun.

But the fall to the concrete floor had been too much for it. One side was badly cracked. And already Kroloski and the masked man were nearly to the fire door.

Tod scrambled past the still-unconscious hoodlum. He jerked up a heavy truck tire and, with the skill born of long experience, sent it rolling down the floor after the running pair. In split-seconds four more of the big non-skids were spinning after the first.

Like juggernauts, they crashed into the masked man and Kroloski, knocking the pair's legs from under them, sending them crashing to the floor before they could reach the fire door.

Before they could recover, blue uniformed police had invaded the vast warehouse and were hurrying down the aisle between the stacks of tires to make prisoners of the big racketeer and his finger man. But Tod no longer was paying them any heed. He was pulling Molly to her feet and begging forgiveness abjectly for his multitudinous sins of the evening.

Before she could answer him, blue-coats were dragging Kroloski and the masked man past them. The young warehouseman glanced up. His eyes lit on the finger man, now minus his face-covering.

"Dale!" he gasped. "Walter Dale!"

Molly gave vent to a tearful: "Oh, Walt!"

The blond, handsome young soldier—and former Griggs employee—glared. "Ah, can it!" he snarled. "I got caught. So what?"

Before he could say more, the officers dragged him away.

"Oh, Tod!" Molly wept, her face buried against her husky sweetheart's broad shoulder. "Oh, I'm so ashamed! To—to think I let you go for that—that—, that—"

"Sure, honey, sure. It's all right,"

Tod soothed, caressing her rippling wave of soft auburn hair. He felt a tremendous inner urge to do a little quiet gloating, but some instinct told him it would be wiser not to let her know it.

The next instant the portly figure of old Jake Griggs himself waddled into view, accompanied by the chief of police.

"Tod, my boy!" old Jake beamed. "If I ever needed any proof of just how valuable you are, this is it. Imagine fighting this whole gang of thugs alone—"

"Skip it!" Tod grunted irritably. "You give me the rawest deal of anyone in the outfit, then come belly-aching around about how valuable I am. You, that wouldn't even have the decency to give me a release so I could get another job!"

THERE was a mischievous gleam in old Jake Griggs' shoe-button eyes. "Molly," he commanded, "tell this young idiot why I wouldn't give him his precious release."

The girl raised her head. The gray eyes were proud. "Mr. Griggs got you another job," she said. "The appointment just came this afternoon. That's why Mr. Griggs wouldn't let you go. He's been trying to get you the best job possible. Only he wanted to surprise you."

"A job?" Tod's face was a study in bewilderment. "I don't get it. What kind of a job?"

Old Jake Griggs chuckled 'til his fat sides shook. "Starting Monday," he proclaimed, "you're a warehouse inspector for the tire rationing board!"

"Holy—I Say, Mr. Griggs—" sudden scarlet flooded Tod's embarrassed cheeks.

His former employer slapped him on the shoulder, still chuckling. "For-

get it," he chortled. "I know just how you felt."

NOW the chief of police broke in. "What I don't understand," he declared, scratching his head in perplexity, "is how you gave us the alarm. That burglar alarm is doctored perfect, but the bells rang down at headquarters just as if the connection had been broken.

"The alarm rings when there's a short circuit, too," explained Tod, grinning. "So when I went past the wires when I got away, I spat on 'em. Nobody had bothered to tape them, so getting 'em wet sent the whole works haywire."

Again Griggs slapped his shoulder. "Fine work, my boy. Fine work. But now"—he glanced at Molly, who still nestled in the young warehouseman's arms—"maybe you'd like to take the lady home."

"I'm sure he does," Molly agreed, smiling up at her rescuer. "He's got so much to tell me."

A POLICE car took them to her home. En route, in an outburst of unequalled frankness, Tod outlined the events of the entire evening exactly as they had happened. The lovely Miss Shannahan eyed him somewhat quizzically.

"Right now," she commented, "I'm inclined to believe almost anything you say. But that story about a little amber devil named Beezelebug . . ." Her voice trailed away and she shook her head amusedly.

"Oh, but it's true," Tod assured her. "Every word of it."

Molly smiled tenderly. "I'm sure it is," she soothed, caressing his forehead. "But you've had a hard night—drinking all that whiskey, and chewing all that snuff, and being pushed

around. You better go home and get some sleep."

"You mean you don't believe me?"

"Of course I believe you, darling."

"No, you don't."

There was a certain asperity in Molly's reply. "Look, Tod," she said. "After all, if this Beezlebug was so successful at getting you into trouble all evening, how is it he didn't finish the job? Why weren't we both killed?"

"We would have been," her sweetheart assured her solemnly, "if I hadn't gotten him first."

"Gotten him first—?"

"Sure. I killed him."

"But you said he claimed you couldn't kill him—"

"I couldn't. Not by hitting him, or things like that."

"Then how—?"

The husky young warehouseman grinned. "It came to me, all of a sudden, while I was lying there on the floor, tied up and waiting to be killed," he explained. "It was so simple I damned near laughed out loud."

"But how—? Oh, hurry up, Tod! Tell me!"

"Well, it all grew out of his being a whiskey spirit."

"You mean—?"

Again the young man grinned. "I learned a long time ago how to 'kill' whiskey," he declared, "so I did the same thing tonight. Honey, I drank every last drop of that Old Harbor Light! And then, just to make sure, I broke the bottle!"

THE END

« FANTASTIC FACTS »

By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT

CAT MUMMIES

IT seems that the ancient Egyptians not only mummified their dead rulers and wealthy persons, but also their cats.

Many years ago an Egyptian farmer, while plowing his field, came upon the opening to a subterranean chamber. He entered the chamber and discovered endless halls lined with shelves containing small yellow bundles. Unwrapping one bundle, he found a cat, perfectly embalmed and wrapped like a mummy.

This discovery came to the attention of an Englishman, who removed 180,000 mummified bodies of cats to Liverpool, England. Here they were auctioned off to English farmers for use as fertilizer on their farms. The sale was not a great financial success either, since the cats only brought about 1/10 of a penny each.

* * *

THE DISAPPEARING ISLAND

ONE of the many curious sights to be seen in the lake region of Michigan is the disappearing island of Lake Orion.

Each year about the middle of August the island rises to the surface of the lake and stays until about the middle of February when it sinks and remains hidden until the next August.

All attempts to either sink the island permanently or to raise it permanently have failed. One summer, residents of the region loaded the

island down with tons upon tons of rock, thinking that when the island sank it would be unable to return to the surface. However, the following August, the island made its annual appearance.

On another occasion, the residents attempted to prevent the island from submerging by chaining the island to the shore with heavy log chains. However, when February rolled around, the island once again submerged taking the log chains with it.

And so now the people let the island alone and each year it rises and again sinks into Lake Orion—another unsolved puzzle of nature.

* * *

CITY OF CRIME

THE city of Irkutsk in Siberia was probably the most wicked city known to man. Not even our own frontier towns during the wild days of the West could compare with the cruelty practiced in this town.

The town has a population of 120,000 and its yearly toll of murders has been as high as 500 a year. Arrests occur in only 12% of the murders and only half of the arrests result in convictions.

Once the town citizens voted for the formation of a vigilance committee to rid the town of its criminal element. However, the plan back-fired when the committee organized was found to consist of the town's worst criminals.

Armed with the unlimited powers given them by the governor, they proceeded to set up a reign of terror that was supposed to "end the crime wave." The committee shot rich merchants in the streets on the charge of their being criminals. They robbed houses and stores while "searching for criminals and their hidden loot." They soon made life and property unsafe in Irkutsk until the people finally rose, took the law into their own hands, and drove the criminals out of their city forever.

* * *

MORTGAGING THE FAMILY HOMESTEAD

THE mortgage on real-estate is the oldest investment on earth. As long ago as 2100 B.C., Babylonians in the reign of King Khammuragas were lending money on mortgages. It is recorded that the Egibi family founded a banking house in 600 B.C. in Babylonia and invested the greatest portion of its funds in both city and farm property. These mortgages were written on bricks that were preserved in earthenware jars buried in the earth (the beginning of our safety deposit boxes) and have now been discovered by archaeologists who have been able to determine the time, place, and amount of each mortgage loan.

* * *

EARTHQUAKE PLANT

A TRULY strange plant is the abrus, a wild plant found in Cuba and India, for it can predict weather conditions with uncanny accuracy. An Austrian scientist by the name of Baron Nowack studied the plant to determine whether or not the so called earthquake plant was a legend or a reality. He found, to his amazement, that by studying the plant one could not only predict the occurrence of an earthquake or volcanic eruption as claimed by the natives but also one could herald an approaching storm or cyclone.

Baron Nowack noticed that an impending fissure in the earth's crust would cause the abrus to change its color. He also noticed that at the same time one could see spots of a given magnitude on the sun's surface. He thus concluded that one must observe both the sun and the abrus in order to predict with any accuracy. If the abrus starts to change its color and at the same time one can observe large spots on the sun, you may rest assured that an earthquake is about to occur.

* * *

SITTING ON \$30,000,000

THE palace of the Mogul emperors at Delhi contained many rare treasures, but the most wonderful of all was the peacock throne built for Shah Jehan by Austin, a Frenchman. It was named the peacock throne because two peacocks stood behind it with their expanded tails inlaid with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, pearls, diamonds, and other precious stones to represent the patterns and colors of a live peacock. The throne meas-

ured six feet long by four feet wide and stood on six legs. The entire throne, including the legs, was solid gold with rubies, emeralds, and diamonds inlaid. Over the throne hung a canopy of gold bordered with a fringe of pearls and supported by twelve gem-covered pillars.

Between the two peacocks, Austin placed a life sized parrot that had been carved from a single emerald. On each side of the throne, an umbrella, the emblem of royalty, was placed. They were made of crimson velvet heavily studded with pearls and had solid gold handles inlaid with jewels.

This beautiful masterpiece was believed to have cost \$30,000,000 and stood in the Shah's Hall of Private Audience. When the Persians overran Delhi in 1739, the Nadir Shah ordered that the throne be broken up and carried back to Persia with the rest of his loot valued at \$750,000,000.

* * *

MOOIE REGISTERS FOR SUGAR

MILWAUKEE, the town made famous by a bottle of beer, again "hits" the headlines because of a pound of sugar. For Harry Goebel, one of Wisconsin's many dairy farmers, registered his cow, Fobes Ormsby Henderfeld de Kaul—just call her Mooie for short—in the national sugar registration.

Farmer Goebel based his claim on the "Illness of Consumer" clause of the Registration Act and produced a certificate from a veterinary which shows that Mooie is suffering from temporary insanity and can only be cured with a daily dosage of a pound of brown sugar—twice as much per day as the average American is allowed in one week. Pretty classy for a cow!

* * *

SHARK PRODUCTS

JUST as American packers have been able to make use of every part of a pig except the squeal, so are American fishermen finding that a shark can be used almost a hundred per cent for some commercial purpose.

An average shark will produce about two to three pounds of fins that are considered quite a delicacy. The teeth and skin both find many commercial uses. As much as forty per cent of some sharks can be used to produce a highly edible dried, salted fish. But probably the most useful product of the shark is the liver which produces an oil high in food and medical value. In fact, the Japs have discovered a process to convert shark liver into an oil that will lubricate airplane motors in temperatures of 45 degrees below zero.

Already shark fishing is proving to be a profitable operation for west coast fishermen due to demands for the liver oil to replace the large amounts of cod liver oil formerly imported from the Scandinavian countries—a source now closed to us by the war.



Weird strains of violin music! . . .

When you go on record and say you don't believe in haunted houses, you shouldn't be afraid to spend the night in one . . .



THAT DREADFUL NIGHT

by
John York Cabot

IT ALL started from the discussion we were having about superstitions. As all such discussions generally do, this one got off on a tangent until we were talking about the terrors lurking in the other world.

Of course I was right up there in front of the conversation, shooting off my mouth at great length and generally letting it be known that there was nothing in existence which could turn

my hair to silver because of fright. "Nothing?" one of our group demanded incredulously.

I found all eyes suddenly focused in my direction, and several expressions of frankly admiring awe.

I cleared my throat.

"Of course not," I told them.

There was a silence. One of those silences which I should have had sense enough to know meant that everyone

present was combing his mind in an effort to hit on something that would force me to back up the bravado of my words.

I got a little uneasy.

"There's nothing," I repeated a little less confidently, "that could frighten me for even an instant."

Nobody said a word. They were still at it. Searching for something to knock me off the roost.

"Think of something," I said. "Think of anything."

I knew that that was precisely what they were all doing, and so I figured I might as well beat them to the punch. It sounded good, anyway.

"Anything in existence?" some one asked.

I nodded nonchalantly. "Anything in the other world," I declared.

The meditation continued. Finally one of the oldest of our group spoke up.

"I remember a place once that darned near scared me solid," he declared. "It was a house."

Everyone supplied the adjective at once.

"A *haunted* house?" they cried.

I had a sudden chill. This was definitely taking a turn I didn't relish.

The old fellow nodded.

"That's what I mean," he said, "a haunted house."

EVERYONE was buzzing with suggestions then. Everyone but me. I just stood there, wondering why, at my age, I'd never gotten sense enough to keep my mouth shut.

Then someone broke in over the buzzing.

"Listen," he said, "who knows a really haunted house in these parts?"

I decided to speak up then before I was completely railroaded.

"Haunted houses," I sneered, "are nothing. Nothing at all." I gave the

statement all the scorn I could muster.

The old guy who'd mentioned the haunted house idea in the first place gave me a solemn glance.

"Have you ever been in a haunted house?" he asked me.

Everyone was looking at me again.

"Of course not," I told him. "They're a lot of nonsense. Stuff for superstitious weaklings to shudder about."

He shook his head sadly.

"I *have*," he declared, and he shuddered, then, as if at the mere recollection of it.

I gave him a tolerant smile and went on with my effort to get the topic off haunted houses.

"Can't anyone think of something tougher?" I begged. "You might as well pick something really stiff or nothing at all."

No one had any suggestions. I was breathing a little easier.

"Good lord," I said smilingly, "surely you ought to be able to think of something."

Sometime I will learn when I have said enough. Sometime I will become smart enough to know when to stop talking. Up until my last bright remark I had been talking them all out of the idea. Now I'd talked them right back into it. At least the old guy, who suddenly shook his head.

"No," he said. "There couldn't be anything worse. I know that for a fact. And if it's so very silly, I'm sure you won't mind taking us up on it."

I looked around the group. The expressions on the faces of all showed that they heartily agreed with the old guy's sentiments.

Definitely, I was in a spot. But nevertheless I had to make one last stab at writhing loose.

"Of course I wouldn't mind," I told them all. "I wouldn't mind a bit. I still say it's silly superstition, and I'm game

to prove it. But, of course, finding a place that's supposed to be haunted is another thing to think of."

I looked around. Most of the group were frowning, combing out the old gray matter again in an effort to think of a house that had the reputation of being haunted.

They didn't seem to be getting anywhere, and once again I was all set to breathe easily, when once again the old guy popped back into the center of my trouble.

"There's an old house not so very far from here," he told me. "Everything I've ever heard about it points to the fact that it must be haunted. In fact," and he paused dramatically, "I've heard the story of one some of us might know, who spent a night in there and *never came out again in the state in which he'd entered.*"

Everyone in the group caught the chilling impact of those words. And I think I caught them harder than the rest.

I gulped, and then I realized that the old guy and everyone else in the group had turned to stare at me questioningly.

Of course I forced a smile.

"Stuff and nonsense," I said. "An old wives' tale."

The expression on the face of the old guy didn't change. He just continued to stare at me.

"Perhaps so," he said. "But the person I referred to, who failed to come out of that house as he had entered, was my brother."

I can tell you here and now that that statement didn't help my state of mind any. I looked at the old guy, trying to read from his poker faced expression whether or not he was pulling a fast one.

Then someone said in an awed, trembly voice, "So that's what happened to your brother!"

It wasn't a fast one. I was sure of that, then. And I was even more certain that I wanted nothing else to do with the topic of haunted houses and the suggestion that I spend the night in one. Particularly the one the old guy had pulled out of thin air.

But one glance around the group showed me only too clearly that there would be no backing down now. I'd stuck my neck out much too far. Much, much too far to ever hope to go back on my brave words and retain any respect among them.

I went 'way down for the smile I finally managed to come up with. And even at that it was a pretty weak effort.

"All right," I said with that hard-to-hold smile. "All right, I'll take you up on that challenge. I'll prove my contention."

What an absolute sap I was—but definitely . . .

AFTER I'd stepped in over my neck, everyone agreed that there would be no sense in waiting any length of time to have me prove myself. And on the suggestion of the old guy, the following night had been chosen for my demonstration of iron nerves.

Consequently all the group met at the same place the following evening, shortly after ten o'clock.

Everyone was especially festive. It was like a great big picnic—to all but me.

They weren't going to walk as far as the door of the chosen haunted house with me. Oh, no. There were none of them quite willing to do that. But the old guy—there he was again—had volunteered to accompany me as far as a half mile from the place. He was to point it out, and then, no doubt, watch from a distance to make sure I carried out my boast.

Of course I didn't like it. And a day of waiting hadn't helped a bit. My nerves, by the time eleven o'clock rolled by, were getting to a state, no fooling.

And finally, when the old guy stood up and said, "Perhaps we had better be starting toward the house," I felt like yelling in sheer relief.

All the group quite insisted on making a point of personal farewells before I set out with the old guy. It was just as if they thought, or hoped, they'd never see me again in the same condition.

There was little I could do about it, however, so I stood around shaking hands and joking and acting very brave until I'd finished the gauntlet of none-too-well wishers.

And then at last I was walking along beside the old guy, heading for a destination which *anyone* with any brains would never set out for.

For companionship I might as well have had no one, for all the solace the old guy provided.

He scarcely spoke at all. And his first words after we'd walked along a while set the tenor of anything he said afterwards.

"There is no moon in the sky tonight," the old guy said gloomily. "It was on just such a moonless night as this that my poor, dear brother entered the house to which I am taking you." He trailed off with a sad sigh.

There was scarcely anything I could say to that. It wasn't the happy sort of stuff I wanted to carry on with, so I didn't answer. But the old guy's words had succeeded in calling my attention to the fact that it was most certainly a dreadful night.

There was no moon, as he had remarked. Nor stars, for that matter. And the lonely, narrow little hillside roadway along which we walked was bordered on both sides by tall, gaunt

trees. The wind was busy whistling eerily through the branches of these trees that night.

Now and then I could see the old guy, out of the corner of my eye, glancing dourly up at me to see how I was taking it. It was hard to be sure whether or not he was hoping I'd be in a dither, or just genuinely sorry for the brash venture I was starting.

It was natural, I suppose, trudging along there in the lonesome darkness of the eerie night, to imagine after a while that eyes were peering out at us from behind the trees bordering the road. At any rate, we hadn't gone very far before I was pretty damned sure that strange eyes *were* following us.

If the old guy had the same sensation, he didn't mention it. And it was certainly a cinch that *I* wasn't going to ask him about the matter.

AFTER a while the roadway along which the old guy was taking me, began a steep and unexpected rise. A minute later and we were standing on the crest of a hill, looking down at a bleak, black mansion on a smaller hill perhaps half a mile off.

"There," the old guy said sepulchrely, "is the haunted house."

My first reaction was an urgent desire to bolt off in the opposite direction posthaste.

Then I was aware that he was watching me narrowly, waiting for any such evidence of change of heart.

"Well, well," I said with as much cheer as I could muster. "Well, well, well. So that's the haunted house, eh?"

"That," said the old guy, "is it."

I laughed a little shakily.

"Well, well," I repeated inanely. "So that's the haunted house, eh?"

"I feel," said the old guy, with an icy stare, "that the fact that that is the haunted house has been fairly well es-

tablished by now."

I gulped, an action that was getting as frequent as breathing.

"Heh, heh," I stalled. "Big place, isn't it? Thought it would be smaller, somehow."

"It seems also somewhat evident," the old guy declared acidly, "that the house is a large one. Are you going on, or aren't you?"

"On?" I squeaked. "On? Oh, yes. Heh-heh-heh. You mean to the house. How silly. But of course."

"Then why don't you get moving?" the old guy asked.

The wind took that moment to howl weirdly through the trees on either side of us. I wasn't certain, but I had the sensation that those unseen eyes were watching us again.

My heart must have shared that sensation, for it suddenly seemed to take refuge somewhere down in my shoes.

"Well?" the old guy said.

"Well," I answered lamely, "uh, ah, so-long. Thanks for showing me the way. I'll, uh, see you later."

The old guy nodded cryptically. "Perhaps," he admitted. "At any rate I hope so."

"Thank you," I said bitterly. "Thank you so very much."

"I'll be watching from this hill," the old guy said.

"Sure," I answered, "sure. I get the hint. You'll see me enter that place, never fear."

The old guy didn't answer, and I started down the hill road. Never had I felt an impulse before as strong as the desire that made me want to turn for one last glance and a wave of the hand at the old guy. But of course I couldn't do that.

I had another sudden impulse to turn around and set a few dash records in any direction leading away from that ominously waiting mansion ahead.

The utter blackness of the night was getting me, now. And I began to wish for the faintest twinkle of a star, or the smallest ribbon of moonlight.

Instead I got an increased howling of the wind through the trees, and an awfully weak sickness where my stomach should have been.

I WAS less than a quarter of a mile away from the blackly forbidding mansion before I was aware I'd covered that much ground. And now I slowed my pace, proceeding more cautiously.

There was a small, grass covered series of wagon tracks where a road had once been, leading off through the trees and up to the mansion itself.

I hesitated there an instant before turning up it, forcing myself to do so merely from the realization that the old guy back there on the hill was watching every move I made.

It got worse moving along that old sideroad through the woods surrounding the mansion. Worse than I imagined it ever could be.

Then it was that I saw the light moving up in the third story window of the otherwise darkened mansion. It was the tiniest pinpoint of light, barely distinguishable. But it was there, and it moved, as if from room to room!

What kept me moving on toward that old house after seeing that light, I'll never know. It certainly wasn't courage, for my teeth were chattering louder than a brace of castinets.

At last I was in the weedy clearing which surrounded the grim old framework mansion. And now, looking up at the third floor again for the first time since I'd seen the moving light, I saw that it was gone.

The ominous old building was black and bleak once more.

There wasn't a sound now, save for

the constant, moaning background of the wind through the gaunt trees. Tensely, I crossed the weedy clearing until I stood at last before the small porchway of the front entrance.

"The old guy is watching," I told myself. "I can't back down, now. The old guy is watching. He'll tell the others if I funk out."

I stepped up onto the porchway and stood there by the door, listening intently.

I heard nothing save the moaning of the wind and the kettle-drum pounding of my heart.

Closing my eyes firmly, I placed my hand on the cold, round surface of the doorknob.

Gently, ever so gently, I turned it.

I found the door opening inward under my pressure. Opening inward, and creaking ever so slightly on its hinges.

OF COURSE I wanted to run like hell again. And of course I wasn't smart enough to do so. I just stood there, the door half open and my hand on the knob.

I stood there, trying to get up courage enough to open my eyes and look into the darkness that lay inside that doorway. My teeth were chattering double time.

Slowly, one at a time, I opened my eyes.

Ahead there was nothing but blackness. Highly uninviting blackness. Distinctly unpromising blackness. Ominously beckoning blackness.

My knees came in on an off-beat to accompany my chattering teeth with a knocking tempo that blended nicely. My pounding heart, of course, filled in the kettle drums to round out my private little rhythm section.

I turned to look longingly back over my shoulder, and was suddenly aware that the moonless night and the black,

unfriendly woods were just as terrifying now as the blackness of the mansion yawning before me.

That was probably the only reason I pushed the door even further inward and stepped into the clammy darkness ahead.

Slowly, gropingly, I put my hands out before me and began a cautious exploration of the room in which I now found myself.

I had located a wall and was using it as a directional guide through the darkness while trying to focus my eyes to this new visual change when the door slammed. The door through which I had entered but an instant before!

I froze there, pressed back against the wall in terror, unable to do anything about it as my teeth and knees began knocking in harmony again.

But there wasn't any further sound. There was nothing else to indicate *that something was in the room with me*.

It must have been fully five minutes later, however, before I thawed from my frozen position. And in those five minutes surrounded by darkness and unpleasant *possibilities*, I must have heard a hundred minor creaking noises.

I moved on, then, a little more swiftly, for my eyes were beginning to focus a little better in the darkness and I no longer was forced to fear looming bulky objects—as long as they didn't move.

By now, I was thinking in terms of finding some spot, some corner where I could crouch against the protection of two walls and peer through the darkness for the rest of the night.

THE house was huge, probably large enough to have some eighteen to twenty rooms in all. But they could keep their eighteen or twenty rooms. All I wanted now was one room. A small one. A safe one. On the first

floor, near a window, where I could jump if I had to.

By now, I was shaking like a pair of dice in the hand of a palsy victim. And I was just turning down what seemed to be a narrow hallway leading off from the big front room, when I heard the creaking of the floorboards in a room somewhere above me.

Of course I had to recall, at that unfortunate moment, the pinpoint of light I'd seen moving along the third floor when I'd been a quarter mile from the mansion.

This time I didn't breathe.

I stood there frozen, wide-eyed in terror, my lungs so full they threatened to burst. Stood there, listening.

The creaking floorboard noise was not repeated.

"An old house," I told myself. "Settling deeper and deeper into the foundations every day, I suppose."

Quick thinking. Easy explanation. Wishful thinking. Wishful explanation. I forced myself to move on through the darkness, down that narrow little hallway.

And then I heard the floorboards again. This time, followed by footsteps. Slow, measured footsteps. Growing louder with every instant.

And then I realized that I was standing near a wide, railed, gracefully turning staircase, and that the footsteps were moving to the top of the staircase, and then starting down!

There was a small, cramped, dark cave beneath the stairs, and I dived into it immediately. Now, the footsteps were right above my head, still measured, descending the stairs.

I tried to remember prayers to say. Especially prayers to cover situations like this. Prayers to deal with terrors of the unknown. It was no use. My mind was as frozen as my muscles.

The footsteps were now at the bot-

tom of the staircase, and they paused for an instant, indecisively.

I could feel those unknown eyes probing slowly right and left through the blackness—searching.

No sound, at first. And then a creaking floorboard. Had I been seen? Did *it* know I was hiding here?

My mouth was cottony thick, my tongue dry and swollen from fear. I'm not at all sure that my heart bothered to beat during the next thirty seconds.

Another creaking floorboard broke the indecisive silence. And then the measured footsteps started again, away, off in the opposite direction of the staircase where I crouched limp with terror.

I LISTENED for another minute, as the footsteps grew less and less audible, finally blending into the awful silence. The thing was on the first floor, in some other section of the house. How long it would remain there I could not estimate.

But I felt fairly certain it would be back this way. And the under-staircase might not be a good hiding place twice in a row. A limply exhausted heap, I pulled myself out from under my refuge and stood up, shaking from head to foot.

I think I had the door in mind when I took those first few steps back in the direction from which I'd originally entered. But it made no difference what I had in mind an instant later. For I heard the footsteps, measured ominous, coming back to the room they had but recently deserted.

The under-staircase was out. And I wasn't certain that I'd be able to make the door before the thing re-entered the room. There was no window within leaping distance, either.

I had but one opportunity. Up the stairs—but rapidly.

It was all I could do to scramble fast and keep quiet all at once. But I man-

aged it, gaining the top landing of the stairs before the sound of those footsteps below got much louder.

I found myself in a hallway, now. A hallway off which there were from four to six doors.

Inching along through the darkness, with one ear cocked toward the staircase I'd just ascended, I came to a door that was slightly ajar. The sound of the footsteps downstairs had stopped again. And now I stood there, listening for any noises from the room with the half opened door.

There was only silence.

And then I heard it. Heard it as my spine froze and icy fingers caressed the back of my neck.

Weird, eerie strains of violin music, coming from the floor below!

My knees were suddenly unable to support me, and every muscle was rigid with terror.

Somehow my hand found the knob of the slightly open door. And somehow I managed to drag myself into that room. I slammed the door behind me, but I didn't care. I was looking for a window.

The violin music had stopped with the sound of the slamming of the door. Then it started all over again, spine chilling, eerie.

I stood there quaking in the darkness of that room, my eyes peering through the darkness at my surroundings. It was a bedroom. An old brass fourposter was against the wall in the center of the room, and beyond that was the window.

The moon came out at that instant, throwing a chill blue light into the room and across the old bed.

This time I couldn't control my reaction. I felt my teeth chatter with the clattering noise of crockery bouncing on a shelf in an earthquake. It was loud, betraying, and I couldn't help it.

For there on that old bed, beneath white sheets, a figure stirred, and then two eyes were glaring at me through the semi-darkness!

I WAS unable to stop the moan of terror that escaped my lips. I must have been on the fringe of gibbering lunacy. My teeth never chattered more loudly.

And then the figure, covered completely by the sheets, sat erect in the old bed, emitting a piercing, ghastly screech!

I remember fumbling for the door-knob. I remember that the sheeted figure was climbing from the bed, gibbering and moaning, and moving toward me.

And then I was yowling madly, tugging at the door, almost knocking myself down as it suddenly swung open.

I raced down the darkened hallway, then, looking over my shoulder only long enough to see that the sheeted figure, still screeching and sobbing and groaning, was in the doorway.

And even as I put my hand on the bannister, I heard the violin music below me stop abruptly. There was a deep, ominous gurgle, then, and footsteps moved down there toward the staircase.

Trapped!

I looked back down the hallway, to see the sheeted thing standing there in the darkness, howling and leaping up and down. There was nothing else to do, so I bolted down the hallway in the other direction.

There were more doors, and I rattled the knobs of each of them, seeking any room with a window from which I could leap. They were all locked. And from behind several there came new hideous moanings and gibberings and ghastly voices.

I was adding to the din now, shriek-

ing bloodily and often, my mind a red haze of hysterical horror.

Looking back but once again, I saw the sheeted figure in the darkness flapping madly around in the hallway at the top of the stairs.

The next five minutes were five eternities of madness.

The entire, ghastly house was alive with screams, shrill cries, gibbering moans, hideous howlings.

Vaguely, I was aware that I was at the end of the hallway, and that there was no longer any avenue for my escape.

Collapsing limply in a heap in the corner, I continued my terrified screams for assistance.

And then I was aware that my head was knocking against a window sill directly above me. So great had been my terror that I'd failed to see the window at the end of this hall.

I dragged myself erect, still screaming hoarsely between gibbering moans. Dragged myself erect and struggled, with almost helplessly weak desperation, to raise that window.

At last it opened, and without looking twice, I hurled myself out of it.

THINKING back on it now, I realize I must have landed on my head in that desperate leap. For the next thing I recalled was a damp chill and moist ground, and I was opening my eyes.

I was still next to the house, lying in a clump of weeds.

Groaning, I managed to climb to my feet. Looking up, I saw that dawn was breaking. I must have been lying there unconscious for several hours.

And then I remembered. I looked up once at the grim, bleak old mansion, saw the open window through which I had leaped.

And then I took to my heels.

I was stumbling, dirty, breathless and ragged when I got back out onto the roadway. I'd taken a short cut through a thicket of brambles.

Then I saw the old man up there on the road hill. The old guy had kept his vigil as I thought he would.

It was all I could do to force myself to slow down, but I managed. When I finally came up to him I was breathing a little more easily, but from the look on his face as his eyes appraised me, I knew there would be no fooling him.

He was, in my estimation, no longer the "old guy." He was now the "wise old man."

"You saw them," said the wise old man somberly.

I nodded wearily. "I was a fool to scoff," I admitted.

"No matter," he said. "Now you have learned. And you were both fortunate and brave to stay there until dawn and emerge as you had entered."

I suddenly decided to say nothing about that leap out the window and the hours I'd spent unconscious. I decided not to mention the fact that I'd have been back, screaming madly, if I hadn't knocked myself out in that leap.

We started back down the road, away from the ghastly, haunted old mansion. Both of us were thinking.

"Perhaps you can tell the others," he said after a while, "that there is such a thing as the other world and creatures that exist in it."

I nodded, making a firm resolve to see that the word was spread convincingly. No more would I join the scoffers who professed scorn at the thought of the existence of the other world. No more would I refuse to believe in people. And never again would I volunteer to spend a night in a mansion haunted by human beings.

No, sir. Not this ghost. Not me!

RESURRECTION FROM HELL

by **DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN**

IT WAS in the spring of 1935 that I cabled the yarn about the hidden munitions and plane plants scattered around the German countryside which resulted in the terse communication from the Press Office of the Third Reich saying, in effect, that I was to pack up my portable and get the hell out of the land of Strength

hang my hat there no later than six days after I'd received my walking papers from Naziland. This cut down what was left of my stay in Berlin by four days. For the Gestapo had permitted me ten days in which to clear out.

None of which hurt my feelings in the slightest. For my usefulness in

The madman of Europe came back from Hell in the flesh, but he came back minus his soul—and Rudolph Hess, rotting in an English prison, went mad when he saw what was in the eyes of this resurrected corpse!

Through Joy. And with alacrity too!

They were extremely gentle about it, those D.N.B. gentlemen who, with hurt feelings and sad firmness, assured me there was no other course open to them after I had displayed such marked "un-friendliness" toward their "aims."

My paper, on the other hand, found a spot for me in Paris, ordering me to

Berlin was officially at an end, and there would have been no point in my hanging around even ten days longer since I was unable to file any more dispatches. I'd have left the morning after the eruption if it hadn't been for the fact that there was to be a gigantic Nazi Party conclave in Berlin just two days later, and my curiosity concerning



"Mein Gott! His eyes! His eyes!"

certain information about friction between two of its leaders just itched to be satisfied.

By staying on a few more days, I knew, I could pick up some hot stuff for a non-fiction book I'd promised to do for an American publishing house some day. So I took my time packing my portable, and pretended to ignore the two stolid gentlemen who had been standing watch across the street from my little apartment for the twenty-four hours since I'd had my clear-out notice from the Gestapo.

I was feeling very smart about taking literal advantage of the ten day order, and exceptionally smug about what a hell of a news story I'd unearthed to cause all this trouble.

Feeling very smart and smug, that is, until Blake Pearson dropped in on me on the afternoon of the eve of the Nazi shindig. Blake was the Berlin man for International Press Features, and we'd been close friends during the three years we both covered the German capital.

BLAKE was big, rawboned, tow-headed. His features were angular and he'd been born in the Arkansas hill country. He was plenty worried as I let him into my apartment.

He didn't waste any time getting to the point.

"Listen, chum," he told me, walking over to the window to look out at the two Gestapo shadows across the street, "you're on a spot—but hot!"

I didn't get it, and I grinned, waving him to a chair.

"You mean those clucks out there?" I said. "They've been standing by ever since yesterday morning when—"

Blake didn't sit down. He cut me off.

"Hell no. I don't mean those guys. And I don't mean anything about your get-out-of-town instructions from

Himmler. This is something worse than that. Something I picked up from Jessert just two hours ago."

"Jessert?" My eyebrows went up a notch. He was Blake's special stool. A German who hated the hell out of the Nazis. Every correspondent has several such grapevines.

Blake Pearson nodded. "Jessert got it from a cousin in the Gestapo. Your neck is on the block. They don't want you to get out of here alive!"

I got very sober and felt suddenly chilly along the spinal column. Naturally. I fished for a cigarette with hands that just wouldn't stay steady, and sat down before my knees gave out.

"Well," I said weakly. "Well, well."

"What in the hell did Krommer tell you?" Blake demanded.

Krommer was *my* special stool. He was a young Austrian whose sister had died after an attack by a Storm Trooper. He'd never thought much of the swastika swine after that.

But I hadn't seen Krommer in over forty-eight hours. I'd cut connections with him and wiped out traces immediately after I'd gotten in hot water with my yarn about hidden plane and munitions plants. It had been the one break I could give him.

"Krommer hasn't seen me since I cabled that story," I said. "He hasn't told me anything."

Blake put his hands on my shoulders.

"Look, chum," he said. "I don't want your damned story. Whatever he told you is no concern of mine. But don't try to tell me he hasn't tipped you off to something plenty hot, and within the last twenty-four hours, too!"

This was getting damned involved.

"On the level, Blake," I told him. "I haven't seen Krommer in two days!"

The insistence in my voice convinced him. But his expression was grimly

worried. "Then he had something for you, some information, which he tried to get through," Blake said half to himself. "Whatever it was, it must have been dynamite."

"Why do you say that?" I demanded.

"Krommer died. This morning. An overdose of castor oil. Gestapo headquarters."

I SAT there stunned. After a minute I was able to mutter, "Good God!"

"And the brownies evidently are sure that Krommer got to you with whatever he'd picked up," Blake said quietly. "For you're next on their list."

"They could never get away with it!" I said desperately.

"Couldn't they?" Blake said acidly. I didn't answer.

"They'd have a tough time putting you under arrest, officially," Blake went on after a moment. "That would cause a hell of a stink. You have a little too much push behind you to make framing you wise. But there are other ways in which a correspondent could be rubbed out."

"Such as?" But my question was just a formality. I knew them, lots of them.

"Accidents," Blake said. "Cars run over people. Men have been known to get dizzy and fall from tall buildings. Electric sockets can play hell if the current's jazzed up."

I held up my hand. "Don't bother about the sub-classifications," I implored him. "I'll admit them."

Blake lighted a cigarette, and I burned my fingers on the one I'd dragged down to a stub. But I didn't mind the burn. It reminded me that I wasn't dead. Yet.

There was a silence while Blake walked over to the window again and moved the curtains back slightly to have another look at the two splendid

examples of Nordic brutality standing across the street.

He let the curtains fall back in place and put a hand in his pocket. His cigarette dangled loosely from the corner of his wide mouth and he squinted at me through the smoke.

"They sharp?" he asked.

I looked up.

"Those cauliflowers across the street," he amplified. "Have you tried shaking them yet? Have you been able to leave here without their catching on?"

I nodded. "For three hours last night," I said. "I slipped out just for the hell of it. Had a few drinks and came back. They never got wise. I got a big laugh out of it."

"Someday your sense of humor is going to kill you," Blake predicted dryly. "How'd you slip them?"

"At the end of the hall," I nodded toward the door, "there's a passage up to the roof. This building is jammed up against another just the same height. There are four roofs after that of the same height. The last one has a fire ladder running down from it to an alley. I went out and came back that way."

BLAKE made a discouraged face. "All for a beer," he said.

"I was thirsty."

Blake shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "You're so coy," he observed. He sighed, then. "Think you could make it that way again?"

"Don't know why not."

Blake looked at his watch.

"It'll be dark in another two hours," he said. "There'll be a car waiting for you in that alley. Motor'll be running. Keys'll be there. You can send it back to me when you get across the border."

I got a lump in my throat, choked it back.

"You're taking a big chance, Blake," I told him, "for me."

Blake made a smoke ring and punched one of his long, big knuckled fingers through it.

"You'll find papers, identification and all, in the glove compartment," he said. "I figured they've already taken your other papers away."

"They have," I admitted. "I was going to be personally escorted to the border as soon as I was ready to leave. They told me my Gestapo escorts would preclude any necessity for me to have papers."

Blake Pearson nodded. "And they weren't kidding, chum. You don't need a visa to hell."

I ignored the unflattering conception of the place from which I'd cable my last dispatch.

"I'll never forget this," I told him.

He grinned suddenly, rubbing his jaw. "Maybe I won't either," he said.

I tried to reassure him. "If they pick me up before I can make the border, I'll tell 'em I stole the car and had the papers forged myself."

Blake really grinned this time.

"My, my," he drawled. "You're not only coy, you're naive!"

The limousine was a low-slung, rebuilt British job, with a Roll's motor and ninety miles an hour under its black hood. The alley was deserted, and the keys were in the ignition.

When I put my hand in the glove compartment, I felt the forged papers there and something else. A German Army pistol. It was in fine shape, and Blake had wrapped a note around the barrel of it.

"Chum: *This thing is loaded for bear. Good luck.*"

Getting out of Berlin proper wasn't too easy. For, as I said before, it was the eve of the Nazi Party conclave,

and the place was lousy with brownies, whooping it up and getting underfoot at every intersection you encountered. Those who weren't stinking drunk and chasing ten year old girls, were stationed at the important road crossings leading in and out of Berlin. They carried leaded clubs and scowled darkly at all passing vehicles, looking for any excuse to vent the spleen they felt at being left out of their comrades' none too clean fun.

But I knew the city, and managed to keep out of the way, and in something less than forty-five minutes, I was roaring out of the last suburbs of Berlin and onto some of Adolf's best country roadways.

OF COURSE I kept off the main highways. They were too well patrolled, for it was along one of them that Der Fuehrer was expected to make his majestic journey into Berlin from his mountain retreat. And there had been rumors that he would arrive in Berlin that evening, for he was slated to open the Nazi convention with a speech on the morning of the first day.

I kept my eyes open and my fingers crossed during the next several hours. And finally, when I figured my luck had been holding out for just about as long as I could expect on those particular highway stretches, I found a fairly decent but lesser travelled route and turned off onto it gratefully.

It was a narrow roadway, not new, but still in good condition and just wide enough to permit two cars heading in opposite directions to pass one another without collision.

Checking on several of the road maps I'd brought along with me, I found that it would add from two to three hours time to my border destination. But that was all right with me. Plenty all right. Just as long as it kept

me out of close contact with the brown-shirts.

An hour later I found the road skirting into thickly wooded sectors, hilly, winding and steep, and I was forced to slow down a bit. Thick forest preserves were more and more frequent until at last the route was continually banked on either side by trees, and the road itself was arched in an avenue of leafy, intertwining branches.

The sky was blotted from view, by now, and it wasn't until I heard the first rumblings of thunder that I realized bad weather was on the menu.

It wasn't long before the rain started. Lightly at first. Then with greater intensity, until at last it was a relentless downpour. I thought of the festive Nazis in Berlin, and smiled at the realization that this would make a wet mess of the ceremonies they'd planned for the next day.

And then I stopped smiling, as I realized that this was showing signs of making my own plans damply uncertain. Showing very definite signs of it; for already the road itself was some six inches under water, with the torrent continuing unabated and promising much, much more.

I cursed myself roundly for having taken this route that had at first seemed so clever. Any other roadway in less hilly and nonirrigated sectors would have been better than this.

Somewhere up ahead of me there would be a washout. There was scarcely any reason to hope otherwise. For by now the rain had reached deluge proportions, and I was already splashing through occasional sections lying as much as two feet under water.

I thought of turning back. But there was little sense in that, even if it wouldn't have been additionally hazardous. The roadway I'd already covered on this route was just as liable to be

washed out as the sections that lay ahead.

"You're a bright boy," I told myself sickly. "A very bright boy."

My palms were damp, and I'd take first one then the other from the wheel to wipe them dry against the front of my trench coat. My forehead was beaded with sweat and I listened to the smooth hum of the motor with sick suspense. Waiting. Just waiting, for the awful splutter that would indicate those motor points had been drenched into uselessness and that the limousine had stalled.

I WAS navigating the more frequently occurring washed - under sections much more slowly, now. But there was little comfort in such caution. For they were getting deeper with every mile.

Once I stopped the car to get out those road maps in an effort to figure out where in the hell I was. But where they'd once seemed crystal clear in my scanning of them, I now found it utterly impossible to line up any of the landmarks I'd passed in the last hour with what I saw on the maps.

I remembered several forks in the road that had cropped up, and thought of the confident assurance with which I'd taken what—in each case—had seemed the obvious continuation of the route.

Now, I wondered if I'd been right. Maybe the other way had been the correct one. Maybe there were recent detours added. Maybe—

I didn't want to think about it. I didn't even want to recognize it as a possible factor. But finally I said it aloud.

"Judas—I'm lost!"

Now, I began to wish frantically for signs of the one thing I'd prayed desperately to avoid up until now: cars. Any cars and all cars. Anything with

four wheels and someone in it to get me straightened out and clear of this forest labyrinth. Hell, I'd have been glad to take the chance of brazening through any suspicion or demand for identification.

And then I came to the tree lying straight across the roadway.

It was a gigantic, massive trunked affair, one side stripped white of bark by the jagged flash of lightning that had felled it.

I had to stop. I couldn't get around, over, or under that tree. It blocked off the entire roadway. All out. End of the line.

Thunder crackled gutturally and the rain continued to drench down relentlessly. I sat there behind the wheel of the limousine, staring out through the waterfall cascading down my windshield like a halfwitted mute.

What now? What to do? What in the hell to do?

I reached into the glove compartment, and without quite being aware of what I was doing, stuffed the papers from it into the inner pocket of my trench coat. I removed the German Army pistol also, placing it in the pocket of the coat.

Then I climbed out into the driving rain.

Slogging through the three inches of water that covered the road, I went around the car out in front of the white glare of the headlights. I tried to move the fallen tree.

In two minutes I was soaked outside by the rain, and drenched inside from the sweat of my futile exertions. I hadn't moved the massive trunk an inch.

I went back to the car, switched off the headlights, and removed the keys. Then I returned to the fallen tree, looked sickly at the grim, unyielding bulk of it, and stepped around it to the other side.

ABOUT twenty yards down there was a sharp bend in the road. I would have driven on past that bend if it hadn't been for the catastrophe of the tree across the road. Now I decided to walk on up to it, on the chance that there might be something of help to me—what, I had no earthly idea—beyond that bend.

A minute later and I'd climbed the ascension of that road bend. It formed a little hill perhaps twenty feet higher than the forest levels on either side of it, and there were crude railings on both sides to remind travelers of the roadway that the turn was none too safe.

One of the railings, the one on my right, was shattered.

It took perhaps half a minute for me to see the twisted wreckage of the once sleek, long, black limousine that lay overturned twenty feet down beneath the shattered guard railing.

Sliding on the slick clay of the embankment, and catching at bushes and branches to keep from falling headlong, I let myself down that drop until I stood beside the wreckage of the limousine.

A brief search of the car and the broken underbrush around it showed me that the occupants, whoever they had been, were no longer around.

There was nothing about the car itself that would serve for any identifying purposes. Except, of course, that it was new, expensive, and had had luxurious furnishings.

I climbed laboriously back up to the top of the bend and stood there looking around.

It was then that I caught first sight of the castle.

Perhaps half a mile back from the roadway, topping an enormous tree sheltered knoll, it stood gaunt and forbiddingly black against the white glare of the lightning flash that brought it to my attention.

And with the brief illumination of that lightning gone, I had to strain my eyes to find it a second time. But there it was. It hadn't been illusion. Dark, blackly majestic, a landmark of the ancient, feudal teuton era.

My eyes were accustoming themselves to the darkness of the night and the torrential veil of the ceaseless rain. And now I saw the four pinpoints of light glimmering from the upper turret towers of the castle.

FOR no longer than two or three minutes I debated my next move. And then, once I'd settled it in my mind, I started out toward that castle. There would be people there. Who they'd be, I had no way of knowing. But neither did I know where I was, or how I'd ever manage to make the border before being tracked down by the Gestapo.

With my forged credentials and a slightly plausible story—which I'd have to invent along the way—there'd be some chance, my only chance. Perhaps, if the castle was inhabited by some rich old peer, there'd be servants and land-tillers to help me move the tree from the roadway, and directions that would help me find my way to the Polish border.

It was a risk I had to take.

I found a muddy lane leading off the roadway, up the huge knoll through the trees, to the grim old castle. It took me more than ten minutes to cover this. And when I finally emerged from this lane into the wide, lawned clearing around the castle, I caught my breath.

There were two sleek black limousines, similar to the wrecked machine I'd discovered below the shattered guardrail along the road bend, parked before the vast, flagstone entranceway to the ancient castle.

I stopped dead, staring breathlessly at them while my heart went through a

series of somersaults. My hand had instinctively gone to the pistol in my pocket, and the touch of it was reassuring, reminding me of what had to be done.

It took me fully a minute to make certain that there were no occupants in those limousines, and all of another minute to decide that there was no one present in the open area around the castle grounds.

Cautiously, then, I crossed the clearing, carefully skirting the parked machines, and made my way up the flagstoned stretch to the huge front door of ancient timber.

I stood there then, less than three feet from the castle door, listening.

Save for the rumbling of thunder in the distance and the torrent of rain washing down from the blackened sky, there were no sounds.

I STEPPED back several paces and craned my neck upward, gazing at the pinpoints of light which still lanced forth from the four turret tower windows at the top of the castle.

Something prevented me from calling out. Something stranger than a sense of caution.

Silently, I moved back to the great old door. And now, for the first time, I became aware that it was slightly ajar.

I stepped up to it, pressing gently inward with my hand against its ancient iron reinforcements. It gave slowly, without betraying noise.

I stepped inside, into a long, stone, barren hallway. A hallway illuminated but faintly by an ancient wick lamp. There was no one in the hallway, and just to the right of the door I saw a narrow stone staircase leading upward . . . to where?

Again I paused, holding my breath and listening anxiously. There was no

sound but the fury of the storm outside. I hesitated, eyeing that staircase, weighing the implications of the silence and the cars out front. The lights came from the tower windows. The occupants were up there.

Quietly I moved across the hallway and started up those stone steps. The staircase turned sharply with the tenth step, and I saw another ancient lamp on a landing just above it.

I moved up to the landing, hesitating as I looked up and down another dim hallway leading off of it on either side. The stairway continued on, and I decided to follow it.

And then I heard the footsteps and voices up above me. Hard, ringing, boot-clad steps!

A heavy door slammed shut somewhere up there, and the footsteps, growing louder, were coming down toward me.

I looked wildly right and left for refuge. There was an alcove in the center of the dim hallway. Quickly, I moved down to it. It proved to be the door to another room. I tried the door and it was locked. I pressed back hard against the door, taking full advantage of its scant concealment.

The footsteps rang heavily down toward me now, and I heard deep, worried, guttural voices speaking in the German tongue.

Then the steps were at the landing, and continuing down the first flight of stairs. I poked my head out quickly—and saw the backs and steel helmets of two Nazi soldiers.

They disappeared down the staircase, and I heard the sound of their hard-heeled boots ringing across the first floor hallway, moving obviously toward the door. Then they stopped.

The Nazi soldiers had obviously taken post at the door.

I was, quite obviously, trapped!

FOR fully a minute I had all I could do to calm the frantic efforts of my heart and stomach to switch places. Only then was I able to step softly out of the doorway alcove and move ever so cautiously down the dimly lighted hall to the staircase landing.

I didn't realize it then, but my instincts of caution and sanity were losing their ancient and bitter grudge feud with my instincts of newspaper curiosity. My heart was hammering now through excitement and a burning desire to find out what this was all about, rather than through fear.

The soldiers, the limousines outside, the lights and voices up in the tower, the wrecked limousine down at the road bend below the shattered guardrail.

All those things fitted together, even though I couldn't explain how or why, into something that my sixth sense told me was dynamite. My sixth sense—a flimsy thread of hunch. But it had never failed me before, and now it was screaming to be followed.

There was no going down. Not down those stairs. Nazi soldiers stood post there now. I'd have a hell of a lot of fun passing off forged papers on suspicious Nazi soldiers.

I started up the second flight of stone stairs. Another turn, another landing, another flight continuing onward. I didn't hesitate. I went on.

The stairway came to an abrupt ending at the fourth floor hallway. A hallway just as long, just as dimly illuminated as the other two below it. But there were three massive timbered doors immediately to the right of the last stone step. And from the cracks at the bottom of each of these streamed light.

I stood there scarcely breathing, as from behind those doors came mumbled conversation. German voices.

And then I heard the sound of the automobile motor coming up into the

courtyard before the castle outside. It must have been heard by the occupants of the rooms just to the right of me. Their voices grew louder, and I heard one of them say in German:

"Thank God, he has come!"

I didn't wait. Whoever had just arrived would be coming up here to this floor, would be coming to see whoever was in those rooms. I thought I heard footsteps from behind one of the doors moving toward it as if to open it.

Swiftly, as noiselessly as I could, I started off down the hallway to the left. There had been a doorway alcove two flights before. There had to be one now! But there wasn't.

Not another door in the hallway, save those three back to the right of the staircase ending. I moved on desperately. I was coming to the end of the hallway. And then I saw it—a tiny alcove just to the right of the very end of the hall.

It was another staircase, leading upward. Cobwebbed and thick with dust. Long unused. Down below, I could hear voices and footsteps starting up the first flight of stairs.

I HEARD the nearest door at the end of the hallway squeak as someone inside started to open it. There was no hesitating now. I ducked up the narrow, dusty little staircase, pushing my way through the heavy tangle of cobwebs. There were some fifteen stone steps to the little stairway, and I covered them in less than many seconds.

They ended at an opening which revealed a dark, cold, vast sort of attic. It, too, was layered with dust and veiled by cobwebs. I pulled myself up through the aperture until I was standing there at last, cold with sweat and shaking with excitement.

Below I could hear the sound of voices and footsteps, muffled footsteps; muttering, guttural voices. I'd moved

none too quickly.

Standing there, I heard the door on the floor below me close—at which instant the voices suddenly seemed much more distinct!

I frowned, getting snatches of germanic conversation, trying to figure this out while I adjusted my eyes to the darkness. And by the time I was able to see fairly well around me, I had figured out the reason for the new proximity in voices.

The place in which I was now standing was the castle's equivalent of a loft. It was the top story, and it extended over all the rooms on the floor just below it. Which meant there was an aperture of some sort in the floor of this loft, above one of the rooms from which the Nazi soldiers had come, and in which the other unknown occupants and the new arrival now were assembled. An aperture through which those voices now were coming.

And then I saw it. By "saw," I mean the pinpoint of light lancing up through a small slotted grating in the center of the loft quarters in which I now stood.

Very cautiously, fearing any echoes that might be set up in this empty, stone floored loft, I moved over toward that tiny ribbon of light.

Standing just above it, and looking down through the small, slotted grating, I got an almost complete view of the well lighted room below. An almost complete view which showed me that the three doors from which I'd heard voices coming all belonged to the same large room.

And, as far as I was able to discern at first, there were four people in that brightly illuminated room. Three of them wore uniforms, and the fourth wore civilian togs.

Of the uniformed three, two were dressed in the Nazi Party garb, and the third, an extremely stout, scowling fel-

low, wore the uniform of an officer in the Luftwaffe.

Of the two men in Nazi Party uniform, one was well proportioned and of medium size. He was handsome in a rugged, rather brutal way. The other was small, thin, with a face full of rat-like cunning and twisted ferocity.

The man in civilian clothes was small, gaunt faced, and bald. He wore thick lensed glasses, and his high forehead above his thin nose was beaded with perspiration. His mouth twitched, and there was fear in his tortured eyes.

THE officer in the Luftwaffe uniform was raging at the cowed little chap in civilian dress.

"You will do it, Ekhorn. You will do it, or else. Don't forget there is still your young son. Your wife remains at large, and your little daughter is also unharmed—for the present!"

The little civilian spread his hands in a pathetic gesture of appeal.

"Gentlemen, please, my family—they have done nothing!"

The thin, rat-faced little man in the Nazi Party garb broke in.

"Doktor Ekhorn," he spat, "we guaranteed their safety, plus your own release from the concentration camp—if you succeed in this for us!"

The little doctor seemed more shaken than before. His eyes were piteously pleading.

"But there is little assurance that such a thing could be done—" he began.

"Animals you have succeeded with!" the Luftwaffe officer broke in, his huge jowls shaking angrily. "We know that. So why not with humans?"

The perspiration trickled down the little civilian's long forehead.

"But a human being," he protested hoarsely, "it is not the will of God that such a—"

The somewhat handsome fellow in the Nazi Party dress broke in for the first time, his face flushed, his eyes fanatic.

"It is the will of Destiny!" he blazed. "You must do this thing!"

The frightened little doctor opened his mouth to protest. The thin, rat-faced Nazi cut him off.

"Your wife, your son, your daughter, Doktor Ekhorn. For them, there will be sheer horror, if you refuse!"

The trembling little doctor's last vestige of resistance crumbled.

"All right," he said thickly. "I shall attempt it. I can promise nothing. Nothing, you understand? But I shall try. You say all my old equipment was rushed here?"

"All that you will need," said the Luftwaffe officer.

"Your antiseptics, surgical gown and kit are in the next room," said the ruggedly handsome Nazi, running a shaking hand through his lank black hair.

The little doctor moved slowly out of my line of vision, then, and I heard a door open and shut as he stepped into an adjoining room.

The ruggedly proportioned Nazi turned on the Luftwaffe officer then, his eyes blazing furious condemnation.

"Your mania for speed, speed, speed was the cause of this!" he blazed. "If this fails I will personally kill you!"

The fat, scowling Luftwaffe officer glared back at him defensively.

"I could not foresee a washed-out road and such a breakneck turn," he said sullenly. I saw then, for the first time, that the big-bellied officer had a fresh bandage on the side of his head. It was tinted slightly red.

"If it had only been you who failed to emerge from the wreck," the rugged young Nazi snarled, "I would be overjoyed! But no! He had to pay for your madman's thirst for thrills!"

Part of the pattern was fitting in. The smashed limousine down beneath the shattered guardrail on the roadway turn was now accounted for.

AND then, with the sound of a door opening and closing again, another cog fitted into place as the little man they had called Doctor Ekhorn reentered my area of vision. For seeing him suddenly in a white surgical gown, and instinctively breathing the name they'd called him by, brought back in a rushing flood the recollection of who and what he was.

Doctor Hans Ekhorn was one of Germany's most celebrated surgeons. For years he had been the president of one of Europe's greatest medical universities. And in 1934, little than a year before this moment, he had mysteriously "disappeared."

"Your own release from the concentration camp." The words spoken by the rat-faced little Nazi but moments ago came back to jolt me. So that, then, was the place to which the famed little Doctor Ekhorn had vanished!

And suddenly my brain was madly sorting and shifting this wild chain of circumstances, seeking a solution. The great Ekhorn released temporarily from the hell of a concentration camp, brought here to this desolate castle, for what?

Doctor Ekhorn moved out of my line of vision until I could see only his legs and the end of a wheeled operating table. I could see the eyes of the other three men in the room watching him tensely. Then I heard Ekhorn's voice.

"How long?" he asked simply.

"Four hours," the rugged young Nazi answered hoarsely.

"There are no scars, no mutilations," the Luftwaffe officer put in. For the first time his voice was shaky.

"An internal concussion was the

cause of his death," I heard Ekhorn's voice say. "How did it occur?"

The Luftwaffe officer answered again, hoarsely.

"An automobile crash. I—I was at the wheel. We were doing close to a hundred. Through a rail guard on a steep turn."

I could see the eyes of the rugged young Nazi Party man boring hatefully into the face of the pot-bellied Luftwaffe officer as he spoke.

"Four hours makes it almost a certain impossibility," Ekhorn's voice declared. "Had I been able to attempt it sooner after the dea—"

I saw the rat-faced little Nazi draw forth a nasty looking German Army pistol and point it in the direction of Ekhorn as he cut him off.

"You will succeed," he grated.

"On animals you have succeeded in cases which have been over six hours gone," the Luftwaffe officer began.

"Shut up!" the young Nazi blazed furiously, his rugged features twisted in agony of torment.

I saw Ekhorn's legs move, as he turned away from the operating table to face the Luftwaffe officer.

"The respiratory-surgery machine," he said quietly.

THE Luftwaffe officer and the young Nazi moved out of vision to a corner of the room, while the rat-faced little Nazi still held his pistol on the doctor. I heard wheels squeaking, and suddenly the young Nazi and the Luftwaffe officer came back into my focus of vision, pushing a huge, cumbersome machine. They wheeled it around beside the operating table until it, too, was just in the edge of my vision area.

Then they returned to join the rat-faced little chap with the pistol. All three pairs of eyes fixed intently on the drama in that corner of the room, then,

as Doctor Ekhorn's legs moved out of vision and he began his preliminary routines.

Minutes passed. Endless minutes broken only by the faint sounds of activity coming from the corner of that room where the celebrated German surgeon was working with desperately incredible brilliance.

All three of the uniformed men were sweating profusely, their faces frozen in granite-like hypnosis as they stared at the corner of that room.

The time continued to crawl by, until every bone in my body was aching from the strain of the vigil, and my nerves were tautening to the breaking point.

It must have been twenty-five minutes after he had started that Doctor Ekhorn's utterly fatigued voice broke the terrible silence.

"It is accomplished," he declared. "He breathes. Life has returned."

Tears welled in the eyes of the ruggedly handsome young Nazi, rolling down his cheeks unashamed.

The rat-faced little Nazi looked evilly triumphant.

The Luftwaffe officer's face wore a curiously unfathomable expression. He licked his tongue across his dry, fat lips.

"The machine," Doctor Ekhorn's weary voice said, "remove it. It is no longer necessary."

He came into my line of vision, taking a surgical mask from his face. His eyes, beneath his thick lensed glasses, were utterly weary. And there was something else written in them. Something sickly terrified.

"He lives," he repeated dully. "But in what manner I cannot say. I can make no promises as to what will happen when the ether wears off. I can make no promises as to *what* will arise from that operating table."

The rat-faced Nazi grinned contemptuously at him.

"Fool talk," he spat. "You have brought him back from the dead, Ekhorn!"

DOCTOR EKHORN nodded slowly.

"He was dead four hours. Now he lives and breathes again. Shortly he will walk and talk once more. I have brought his *life* back into his body, but I do not know if it was too late to recapture the *soul* for that body."

"The soul!" There was scorn in the word as the rat-faced Nazi hurled it at the doctor. "Such rot from a man of science!"

Doctor Ekhorn answered.

"I have tampered with things man was never meant to touch. I have resurrected. I have defied the law of creation and death. There is a penalty for such things. In animals, my experiments were but for purposes of scientific curiosity. In this, my first human resurrection," he shrugged, "I cannot predict the result."

"You are a fool!" the rat-faced Nazi blazed. "He lives—and we will see that he never dies again. He is as before!"

Doctor Ekhorn turned his back on the rat-faced Nazi at that instant, peeling off his surgical gloves.

I am never sure, in thinking back, whether or not the thin, rat-faced little Nazi pulled the trigger through a sudden mad impulse, or according to previous plan. But the shots, three of them, blasted forth nevertheless.

Little Doctor Ekhorn fell forward to the stone floor, his head pillowed in his own blood. He looked ironically peaceful and at rest.

The younger Nazi and the bloated Luftwaffe officer had wheeled at the sound of the first shot. They watched Ekhorn crumple to the floor impassively.

The rat-faced little Nazi returned the smoking gun to his pocket with a grin.

"Now we must destroy the machine," he said. "No one must ever know of this. After that, we can call Doctor Henzul. We must tell him only that there was the accident, and that he miraculously escaped with his life. Doctor Henzul can nurse him back to strength."

The pot-bellied Luftwaffe officer and the young Nazi moved out of sight toward the operating table and the weird machine. They moved the latter back to the opposite corner where it had originally been.

The rugged faced Nazi spoke then. His voice was tremulous.

"Let us look just once at his face," he said huskily. "At his face, alive and vital once more."

The rat-faced Nazi nodded.

"If you wish, Rudolph."

The Luftwaffe officer followed the rugged young Nazi to the operating table, with the rat-faced Nazi bringing up the rear. I could now only see their legs as they grouped around the person on that operating table.

"He breathes, oh God. I dared not hope for this!"

The exclamation was torn from the young Nazi, Rudolph.

"His eyes," said the voice of the rat-faced Nazi suddenly, "are *fluttering*. *They open!*"

I HEARD the simultaneous gasp from the throats of all three, then. Sharp, jagged, horrified.

It was the voice of the young Nazi, Rudolph, that cried out.

"*Mein Gott, his eyes, his eyes! What has happened?*"

It was the voice of the Luftwaffe officer that said hoarsely, horrified, "*Gott in himmell, they are the eyes of the Devil!*"

It will always be a matter of undying

regret to me that I never saw the body lying on the operating table in that mountain castle in Germany; the body that was brought back across the black gulf of Death itself, to live and breathe once more.

For I had a gun in my pocket, and I'm certain I'd have used it to send that creature back to the abyss of Hell into which his death from that automobile wreck had sent him.

But I had to use that gun rapidly and well, in the next thirty seconds when two German soldiers burst in on me in that castle loft. I had the advantage of darkness. Their flashlights gave them away. My aim was excellent. It had to be.

Finding the small door that led to the castle roof was sheer luck. But find it I did. And one of those incredibly huge trees provided the ladder by which I made my way to the ground.

I'm certain that those two soldiers were the only others in the castle save those I'd watched in that room. And it must have taken the Luftwaffe officer, the rat-faced Nazi, and the black haired young Rudolph considerable time to locate the sound of the shots and find the bodies of their guards.

I was gone by then, in one of their limousines, leaving the other two with punctured gas tanks. Even today, I cannot reveal the names of the peasant farmers who helped me across the Polish border.

But I can reveal the names of the men in that room. And it is not too hard to speculate on what has happened among them thereafter. Much of it is recorded history.

The fat man in the Luftwaffe officer's uniform was Hermann Goering.

The young Nazi with the given name of Rudolph had the surname of Hess.

The thin, rat-faced little Nazi was Joseph Goebbels.

And I submit that the creature on the operating table, the thing called back from the black voids of Death to live again, *was Adolph Hitler!*

CHECK the newspaper files concerning that Spring Nazi Party gathering in Berlin, 1935. Der Fuehrer was "suffering from a cold" and put in no appearance.

Check, too, if you will, the sudden tremendous increase in Nazi atrocities and brutalities through Germany itself from that Spring of 1935 until the day the Terror flamed quite suddenly across the world with the invasion of Poland.

The man whose soul had fled the dead body lying on that table in the lonely mountain castle on the eve of that Nazi Party conclave in 1935, was a vicious, sadistic bully, an underhanded politician, a most cunning opportunist. That was the Hitler who had died.

The thing that was resurrected from the very pits of hell itself, on that same evening, was nothing human, nothing earthly. It was the incarnation of Evil; a hideous, slaving monster in human form. A monster that is at this moment

grasping for the world.

I know not what thing it is that inhabits the shell of the petty beast who met his death that night. I only know that Adolf Hitler died in the spring of 1935. Died in the smashed and twisted wreckage of a car driven by the speed-crazy Goering, who somehow escaped alive.

I only know that Germany's most brilliant surgeon, a man who had brought animals back from death in "curiosity" experiments, made life pulse again, that night, in the body of a tyrant he despised. And I recall his words of warning before that monstrous resurrection:

"I can make no promises as to *what* will arise from that operating table if I succeed."

And I can still recall the shrill scream from the lips of Rudolph Hess as he looked into the eyes of the thing that had struggled back from slime of hell to breathe once more on that operating table.

A Rudolph Hess who is rumored to sit this very day in the black corners of an English cell—quite impossibly mad.

« THE INSECT THAT PRAYS »

By WILLIS WHITE

THE mantis is one of the strangest of all insects. It is a rather clumsy and slow insect and so it must use its wits to secure its meals. Its favorite trick is to assume a pose that resembles a person praying with its forelegs or "arms" joined and uplifted to heaven. But just as soon as a fly or other insect comes within striking distance, out shoots an arm from its pose of "reverent" devotion to snare the victim.

Various peoples have looked upon the mantis with reverence and the ancient Greeks even claimed that it had supernatural powers. The Mohamedans say that the mantis faces Mecca while "praying" and therefore respect it. But the Hottentots of Nubia actually worship the mantis. They believe that a man is a son of heaven if the mantis alights on him and that anyone destroying a mantis will lose all his hunting skill and become an outcast.

The Chinese, however, hold absolutely no respect for the mantis. In fact, they long ago discovered that the females of the species will fight one another to the death if provoked. They have thus devised a means of entertainment and gambling by matching female mantises. The blows delivered by the mantis are very powerful and one or both fighters have been known to lose a limb or even be cut in two from a stroke of these forelegs.

The poor male of the species is in a real predicament. It is up to him to woo the female during the mating season but her method of refusal is quite harsh. Being stronger and larger than the male, the female will kill the male and have him for her dinner if she does not wish to have him for her husband. Thus the male must be cautious—if he picks the wrong female to woo, he'll never have a chance to woo another.

« THE NOBEL PRIZE »

By PAIGE WHITNEY

ALFRED BERNHARD NOBEL, although he invented one of the greatest destroyers of man—dynamite—left his entire fortune with the exception of few small legacies to promote peace and scientific advancement among mankind.

Nobel was a strange man in many ways and had some very radical ideas. He was one of the early advocates of "mercy" killing, a practice whereby persons suffering from an incurable disease could be painlessly killed. But probably his strangest ideas were those on inheritance. Nobel was of the opinion that inherited wealth was a curse and not a benefaction. He said that it could never bring real happiness to the receiver and would often dull his faculties and ambition to such an extent that the world might be robbed of a potential genius. Nobel believed that a wealthy man should leave his heirs only a small legacy which would excite their ambition to make something of themselves.

With these views in mind, Nobel left each of his heirs a small legacy and set up a trust fund of the remainder of his \$9,000,000 fortune. He willed that this fund be invested in safe securities by the administrators and the income be divided into five equal parts which would be distributed each year to the five persons who had performed the greatest service to humanity in the preceding year.

The famous will reads as follows:

"The income shall be divided into five equal parts which shall be awarded yearly:

"The first to the person who shall have made the most important discovery or invention in the domain of physics.

"The second to the person who shall have made the most important discovery or improvement in the domain of chemistry.

"The third to the person who shall have made the most important discovery in the domain of physiology or of medicine.

"The fourth to the person who shall have produced the greatest work, in the ideal sense, in the world of letters.

"The fifth to the person who shall have exerted the greatest or the best action for the fraternity of peoples, for the suppression or diminution of permanent armies, and for the formation or spread of Peace Congresses."

These awards are controlled by the courts of Sweden. The first two awards are made by the Royal Academy of Sciences in Stockholm; the third award is made by the Caroline Medical-Chirurgical Institute of Stockholm; the fourth award is decided by the Swedish Academy in Stockholm; and the Norwegian Parliament decides the winner of the fifth award.

The first awards were made in 1901, and as the income of the fund was found to be \$200,000 each year, each prize consisted of \$40,000. The physics award was made to Professor W. K. von Roentgen, a German; the chemistry award was won by Professor Jacobus H. van't Hoff, a Dutchman; Dr. Emil A. von Behring, a German, won in the field of medicine; M. Sully Prudhomme, a Frenchman, won in literature; and Dunant, a Swiss, and Passy, a Frenchman, shared the award for peace.

And regularly thereafter, with only a very few interruptions, these awards have been made each year.

« MERCURY POISONING OPERATION »

By ROLAND BIRCHLEY

CECOSTOMY is the name of the operation which will save the lives of persons who have swallowed the deadly poison, bichloride of mercury.

This operation consists of an opening into the cecum, a sort of dilated pouch into which open the large and small intestine and the appendix.

Bodies of persons who had died from bichloride of mercury poisoning were carefully examined. It was found that gangrene developed in the lower intestines in a large percentage of patients who lived beyond the first twenty-four hours after swallowing the poison. This gangrene was

responsible for the deaths of these patients.

Dr. Samuel Berger of Cleveland and his associates, Drs. H. S. Applebaum and A. M. Young, who made the discoveries and examined the bodies instituted a treatment which consisted of a constant flushing of the gastro-intestinal system with water through the opening made by the cecostomy operation. This flushing interrupts the passage of the poison from the colon to the stomach and averts the development of gangrene.

The procedure is only successful when performed within a few hours after the poison has been swallowed.

OUTCASTS OF



Blood welled from the wounds . . .

ETERNITY

by **POLTON
CROSS**



There was no place in eternity for these unfortunates—no place in time or space. It was a fate that staggered imagination.

THE space ship lay motionless in the long valley of sand, banked on both sides by gently sloping ocher walls. Eighty feet below desert level, lurked vestiges of Martian air—woefully thin, a sheer agony to breathe, but still capable of supporting life in an unprotected human being for perhaps fifteen minutes.

In the control room of the space ship were three people—Ron Dawlish, the amiable, tow-haired, blue-eyed engi-

neer who had designed this vessel and alone possessed the secret of the special fuel which drove it through the void; Nancy Dawlish, his wife—small, slender, blonde-headed, with a bright eager face testifying to the thrill she was getting out of this first space expedition from Earth. . . .

And the third member was Clay Reynolds, Ron's lifelong friend—radio expert, astronomer, Egyptologist—in fact a veritable "Admirable Crichton"

of science. Right now he sat huddled over a variety of photographic plates, earnestly studying them from under drawn brows. He didn't even seem to be aware of Ron and his wife as they stood looking out of the port.

"I just wonder what it *does* mean?" Nancy mused, for about the twentieth time. "If we could only find out it might give us a big clue to the mystery of Martian civilizations, don't you think?"

Ron nodded slowly, gazing across the sandy valley floor. The view was the most puzzling of any they had seen on the red planet. On the valley floor sprouted queer, cactuslike vegetation, armed with numberless viciously sharp barbs. This in itself was not so very extraordinary, of course, since air was present in this spot. The extraordinary thing was that the life should be present on this one spot on Mars and yet nowhere else—for in three months of probing, photographing, and securing data, the Dawlish Expedition was quite certain this life was alone in its glory.

In itself this was remarkable enough—but perhaps even more remarkable were the unmistakable remains of one-time Martian civilization in this same spot. For across the valley from where the spaceship lay, protruding out of the yellow wall of sand, were smashed and eroded stone columns undoubtedly molded at some time by intelligent minds and hands—and since then buried through incomputable centuries by the eternally shifting sand, blown in the thin arctic wind of the dying planet.

Most fascinating of all—the thing that absorbed the attention of the three, even as it had done from the first moment—was a Martian inscription. It was hewn in the stone of an archway supported on two cracked pillars. It

protruded from the waste like a forgotten signpost, or else a text or dedication of some kind.

Believing that all hieroglyphics are capable of solution, and having a sound knowledge of Egyptology and Sanskrit, Clay Reynolds had worked ceaselessly on trying to solve the inscription for nearly three weeks. First he had ventured out in a space suit and cleaned away drifted sand from the arch; then with a flame gun he had scored the marks of erosion away and laid bare the text to the weak glimmer of the Martian sun. Then he had photographed it—normally, then with infra red and ultra violet, getting every sign pin-sharp.

But, as his worried expression showed, he had given himself the devil of a task.

"Maybe it isn't anything worth bothering about at all," Nancy smiled, turning from the port and coming over to him.

"I don't like being beaten, Nan," he growled back, setting his square jaw. "Besides, I *have* got started. The first four words make me want to go on. They read—'To Him to Whom—'"

"Sure that's right?" Ron frowned, staring at him.

"No, I'm not sure, but it's as near as I can translate. A queer beginning, I know—but then think of some of our Earthly legal documents which begin—'To Him to Whom it May Concern. . . .' It is possible, you see."

RON grinned even though his gray eyes were solemn. "Be a devil if it turns out to be a quotation like 'Right is Might' or 'They Shall not Pass,' won't it?"

"Anyway," Nan said, "I don't see that we need to spend any more time here, Clay. You can work out that idea as we travel." She glanced at

Ron. "What do you think?"

"You're right. After all, the Science Institute backed this expedition purely for research purposes, and we don't want to be too long over getting back. We've got everything we need—specimens, photos, samples. Locker's chock-full."

"Okay," Clay growled. "But I don't like deserting a dead Martian city without knowing all about it." He got up. "Tell you what— While you make the arrangements for departure I'll take one last look around."

"Right," Ron nodded, and motioning Nan to help him he turned to a routine check up of the firing equipment.

In a few minutes Clay heaved his heavy, powerful form into a spacesuit, strapped on camera equipment and one or two special instruments, then with a nod of his helmeted head he made for the airlock. When he had reached it he paused for a moment and switched on his audiophone.

"Not this time, Bouncer!" his voice admonished. "This is no place for Scotch terriers. Be off with you. Shoo!"

Bouncer, a long-backed, bandy legged Aberdeen, who bore the distinction of being the first dog to cross from Earth to Mars, gave Clay a disappointed glance of his red-brown eyes, then sat down disconsolately on his haunches.

"Bouncer!" Nan called, glancing round from the rocket tubes. "Bouncer, come here, boy! Come on!"

Clay grinned behind his visor, then turned to the airlock screws and twisted them. For a moment, as he tugged the lock open, Nan and Ron felt their hearts race as the air pressure dropped: then it became normal again a few moments after the lock had closed.

SO intent did they become on their work, cleaning out the firing cylinders and resetting the flash points of the electrical mechanism, they hardly noticed how the time passed, nor for that matter were they concerned about it. Clay had a habit of staying away for hours at a time when he got on a hunt. Since he was well able to take care of himself that didn't matter so much.

Then at last Nan threw down a wastecloth and rubbed a grease smudge from her tip-tilted nose.

"Don't know about you, Ron," she said, "But I'm wondering if I wasn't a bit hasty in suggesting we return home. Come to think it over, I'm not so sure I want to go."

Ron stared at her in surprise. "But why not? Space is interesting, I know—fascinating if you like—but there's a limit. I can't imagine anything worse than just wandering about in the void on constant expeditions. Besides, when we get back to Earth think of the acclaim we'll get! We're the first Earthlings to travel through space, both ways, in safety! Or we *will* be, anyway."

Ron stopped and took a deep breath. "Don't you realize, Nan, that it means the Dawlish Space Corporation will become an established fact? And with me at the head of it because I'm the only one who knows the formula for the fuel. . . . Wealth—power—success! Think of it! And then you stand there and say you're not so keen on returning!"

She shrugged, and he frowned at her pretty, troubled face.

"What *is* it, Nan?" he smiled, hugging her to him.

"Well, I know we'll get the fame and the glory; but that is simply as a matter of course. What worries me is the danger of our success. The trials of

this expedition will be as nothing compared to what we'll face against the commercial moguls of Earth. Take Calver Doone for example."

"Him?" Ron looked grimly reflective. Calver Doone was head of Strat-American Airways Corporation. The discovery of super-fast fuel and space travel by Ron had already made Doone pull sundry wires—ethical and otherwise—to learn the young inventor's secret. What he would do when he knew space travel and commerce was to become an established fact was problematical.

"Well, I'm not afraid of Doone," Ron growled at last, shrugging. "I'll have strong men behind me, just as he will. After all, one can't be unreasonable enough to expect a gigantic project like space travel to be launched on a commercial basis without certain vested interests getting jittery—and tough."

"No, I suppose not," Nan admitted, biting her lip uncertainly. "But Doone is so ruthless I feel afraid for you."

"Then don't," Ron smiled. "I'm pretty hard when I'm pushed, and Clay isn't anybody's fool— Ah, talk of the devil!" he broke off, as the airlock swung inwards momentarily and closed again.

Clay came clumping in in his space suit. Slowly the air pressure went up to normal.

"Well, find anything?" Ron inquired.

"Like hell!" Clay responded, when he'd tugged off his helmet. "I'm no nearer than I was to start with, and I still don't know what the rest of those ciphers mean." He shrugged. "Well, there it is. Seems to me the best thing we can do is go back home. Everything all set?"

"I guess so," Ron nodded, moving to the control board. Then just as his hands gripped the power switches Nan

gave a sudden horrified shout.

"No, no, Ron, wait a minute! There's poor Bouncer out there!"

"Bouncer!" Ron gasped, and turned to look through the port.

Sure enough there was the terrier lying on his side amidst the cactus, his ribs heaving up and down painfully as he struggled to draw in the thin air.

"The little devil!" Clay exploded. "Don't you see? He must have skipped through the airlock when I first went out— Hey, Nan, where are you going?" he demanded, as he saw her twirling the airlock screws.

"Out to get him, of course," she retorted.

"But wait a minute!" Ron cried. "You can't go out just as you are! You need a—"

"Oh, I'll be all right," she said briefly. "It's only a few yards and I can hold my breath . . ." And with that she slipped through the opening and closed the airlock after her.

CLAY, half in and half out of his space suit, glanced at Ron. Then they both swung to the port and watched anxiously. Nan came into view almost immediately, taking the long jumps only possible in a gravity like Mars. But she overpitched her last leap and went flying a couple of yards beyond Bouncer, finally crashing into the midst of the bristly cactus.

"Ouch! I bet that stung," Ron muttered, as he watched Nan get up and massage her arm and shoulder painfully. Then she turned quickly, picked up Bouncer, and came stumbling back.

Clay swung open the airlock for her and she came staggering in, two little smears of blood under her nostrils. She reeled giddily, then Ron caught her and drew up a chair. Slowly her labored breathing became more natural and her blood-shot eyes cleared.

"Phew, that was tougher than I expected," she ejaculated. "I held my breath, only that fall into the cactus made me lose it in one grand puff." She winced suddenly. "Still got some of those cactus needles in my shoulder unless I'm mistaken."

"Soon have them out," Ron said, and reached into the cabinet for the surgical forceps. Clay, however, was already using them, pointed to half a dozen vicious needles on the bench beside the fast reviving Bouncer.

"Um, how nice," Ron said grimly. "What about him? Be okay?"

"Sure," Clay grinned. "He's Scotch, isn't he? Bad lad," he added, as a wicked brown eye looked at him.

Within five minutes Ron had extracted four needles from Nan's shoulder. Then he bandaged it and handed her a glass of foaming restorative.

"Thanks," she smiled. "You should have been a surgeon, not an inventor."

"You feel no ill effects, Nan?" Clay asked, studying the needles under the binocular microscope.

She glanced at him in some alarm. "Why, no. *Should* I?"

"I don't know," he said, looking up and frowning thoughtfully. "The needles have traces of some sort of gummy substance on them. That's no reason to suspect poison, though. I'm simply remembering that we're on an alien world . . . Probably ordinary sap."

"It had better be!" Nan cried, getting up and coming to look at them. "I don't want to start passing out now just when we're due to collect the glory."

"We've specimens of the cactus in the locker," Ron remarked. "Why not have a look at them, Clay, and—"

"Not worth it," he interrupted. "They're at Martian temperature and pressure in that locker. Pulling them out for any length of time into these Earth-norm conditions might kill them

off— In any case if there were anything wrong Bouncer would show it quickly enough and he isn't doing it," Clay finished with a grin, as the terrier got up and wagged his impudent tail.

Then Clay turned to sweep up the needles, but Nan gave him pause and instead dropped them into a small vacuum jar and clamped down the lid.

"What's the idea?" Ron asked in surprise.

"Souvenirs," she shrugged. "Some day when I'm an old woman and feel like telling yarns I'll produce these as evidence. . . ."

Ron smiled a little, but he thought he detected a vague light of fear in Nan's blue eyes. Only her laughing mouth seemed to belie it.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" she demanded, as Ron and Clay both stood looking at her, still trying to interpret her action. "It is time we were on our way, isn't it? Let's go."

Ron nodded a silent acquiescence and settled at the switchboard, pulled over the power levers. With a blasting roar which sent tumbling sand in all directions the vessel lifted from the valley floor—climbed swiftly away from the enigma of a lost Martian civilization towards the eternal stars.

CHAPTER II

THE journey back was monotonous insofar that it contained no new elements. There was none of the fascinating interest of the first trip into space. The view of the stars, the planets, the Moon and the Sun, had lost its attraction. The whole thing was boring, crossing a gulf of forty-five million miles.

Nor was it possible to communicate with Earth for space radio had still to be solved. Not until they got to within at least five thousand miles of Earth's ionized layer would they be able to re-

ceive or transmit messages.

So Ron, leaving the robot pilot to eat up the distance, spent most of his time classifying the specimens they had brought from Mars. Most of the period Nan helped him, or else she attended to the essential domestic part of the trip. At other times she played with Bouncer, who seemed to have quite recovered from his Martian exploit. And Nan herself had apparently quite forgotten her painful acquaintance with the cactus. Nothing untoward had presented itself, except of course a dull headache, but this she put down to space strain increasing her blood pressure.

Clay, as usual, spent every waking moment working on the Martian hieroglyphics, and little by little, as Mars waned to an orange globe and Earth increased from a green star he began to make headway, working out the root formations of the characters, their application as compared with the three words he had already solved, and so on— Until one "morning" he gave a sudden whoop.

"I've got it!" he yelled, his eyes shining triumphantly. "It checks up. So it must be right."

Ron and Nan, busy with their cataloging, looked up in breathless interest. Bouncer twisted his big head on one side.

"It's a bit paradoxical," Clay went on, pondering his notebook. "Sort of silly thing to—"

"Damn that! What does it *say*?" Ron yelled.

"It says—'To Him to Whom Eternal Life is Given, He an Outcast Shall Become'."

"Huh?" Ron ejaculated, staring at him.

"Say it again," Nan ordered, puzzling.

So Clay repeated it and looked apologetic. "I told you it was paradoxical.

Anyway I believe it's right, though I don't pretend to gather the meaning. Unless the Martians perhaps somehow found the secret of eternal life and didn't like it when they *had* found it. Personally, I see very few drawbacks to eternal life. Seems to me it ought to be grand to have all eternity to work in. Think of watching inventions come to full flower."

"But there's another side," Ron reflected. "I mean the tragedy of seeing those whom you love grow old and die while you remain young . . ." He paused and shrugged. "Well, it sounds sort of screwy to me. How eternal life could make anybody an outcast I'm damned if I can see. Seems to me that anybody with the gift of eternity should be able in time to rule the world, either wisely or ruthlessly according to temperament. What do you think, Nan?"

"I don't get it at all," she said. "Sounds like a silly sort of inscription to leave on a city archway. And it tells us nothing after all. I had hoped it might explain away the mystery of Mars' vanished civilizations or something. Too bad! Now we shall never know."

With a puzzled frown she turned back to the cataloging, then began to look around her.

"What's up?" Ron asked, watching her.

"I'm looking for my pencil—"

"Looking for it? It's in your hand!"

She stared at the pencil in her fingers blankly. "Well," she whispered; "so it is!"

"What's the matter?" Ron asked, grinning. "Forgotten where you are, or something?"

NAN did not answer him. In fact she could not. She was too utterly shocked inwardly by the realization that her first and second fingers and

thumb on her right hand had lost all sense of feeling. Even now, as she wrote stiffly, the pencil was making no pressure in her grip. She tossed it down, lowered her hand to her side. It felt like something dead hanging on her wrist. She looked at it with apparent casualness, but so far as color went it was unchanged. Only the skin seemed to have a shiny touch which was definitely unusual.

"Something the matter?" Ron asked, as she stood pondering.

Nan was not a girl to be easily frightened, so she shook her head slowly—but she was remembering that this was the arm and shoulder which had had the full force of the cactus needles—Ridiculous! Absurd! Just cramp from too much writing.

"I'm getting sleepy again," she announced presently. "I think I'll turn in for a bit."

"Okay," Ron acknowledged, pondering his list.

"Uh-huh," Clay agreed, immersed in his Martian ciphers.

Nan turned and whistled Bouncer to her. He followed her along the passage. Immediately she had entered the tiny bedroom and closed the door her face settled into troubled lines. Her hand by now should have been normal but it wasn't. . . .

"Bouncer," she whispered, "I don't feel too good. And I'm a bit scared too!"

He cocked his head and protruded his pink tongue. Struck with a sudden thought Nan turned to the dressing table. In doing so she forgot Bouncer for a moment, felt his thick front paw crunch under her foot—but his usual complaining howl failed to come forth. Instead he merely moved to one side.

Nan looked at him strangely, then squatted down and called him to her.

"Bouncer, are *you* dead in parts

too?" she breathed, and he licked her hand in reply. She thought for a moment, then tugging a pin from her blouse she pushed the point gently into the pad of Bouncer's left foot, watching him keenly the while. He took no notice . . . With a deepening horror in her heart Nan drove the pin into her own numbed hand and saw it sticking firmly into the thumb surrounded by a tiny globule of blood. But reaction was totally dead. She had never even felt it.

"Bouncer," she said slowly, feeling the color drain out of her face, "something is terribly wrong with both of us! Maybe that cactus *was* poisoned, after all! But we're not going to tell Ron or Clay— Not yet. The effect might go off, then think what fools we'd look! 'Sides, we don't want anything to interfere with his happiness when he gets back to Earth, do we?"

Bouncer jumped to the bunk beside her as she slowly sat upon it. She cuddled him up under her arm, smiled gravely into his big, solemn looking face. . . .

ALL unaware of Nan's private worries—for her queer ailment showed no signs of improvement as Earth swung nearer out of the void—Ron and Clay began to look forward eagerly to the arrival awaiting them.

The radio was in operation now and they had a pretty good idea of the welcome ahead of them. In New York City, apart from the civic authorities, there were gathered the scientific representatives of every land waiting to pay due homage to the pioneers. . . .

"Great, isn't it?" Ron breathed, as he drove slowly down at last through Earth's atmosphere. "If those television scenes we've had are any guide we're going to get the biggest ovation ever. . . ."

"Yes, I guess we are," Nan admitted, gazing moodily down on the ever swelling, detailing landscape.

"What's wrong?" Ron demanded, clasping her dead right hand. "You've looked down in the mouth now for—ages. If it's Calver Doone still biting you just forget it. We'll take care of it. I suppose that *is* what's worrying you?"

Nan seized on the excuse to give a quick nod of assent. In the back of her mind she was wondering if she ought to confess how ill she felt, how curiously lifeless her whole body was fast becoming . . . Yet still the dim hope that she was only suffering from excessive space strain, which would soon pass away, held her back from utterance.

"To hell with Calver Doone!" Clay Reynolds snorted, as he saw Nan's nod of assent. "If he starts anything he'll get an answer—and damn quick!"

And at this precise moment Calver Doone was standing gazing through the window of his private office window on the 152nd floor of the Doone Building. In appearance he was rather different from the popular conception of a self-made financier and industrialist.

He was small, with narrow stoop-shoulders and a face as thin as an ax. In the lean, acid features and thin-lipped mouth there was something startlingly in common with a snake. It was the kind of face from which one instinctively averts the gaze.

"Look at it!" he breathed, in a voice white with anger. "Flags, bunting, ticker-tape, bands— Look well, gentlemen, for we're not gazing so much on the birth of a new age as on the death of our own!"

Four men were grouped about him, specially summoned to observe this gala occasion. There was Grant Meadows, the oil multi-millionaire—lanky, square

jawed, habitually silent; Rolinac, the thick-necked, big-stomached steel king; Pascal, the immaculate, vinegary banker; and Dilson, Chief of United European Air Lines, a light eyed little man with knobbly knuckles which he incessantly massaged with his palm.

It was queer how Doone, for all his smallness, seemed to dominate the group. An observer would have felt compelled to look mainly at this little figure with the narrow back standing with hunched shoulders before the window. Sunlight set his thin gray hair into a haloed mist on his small head.

"He ought never to have succeeded!" he breathed, thumping his clawlike fist on the window frame. "According to the telecast a moment ago he's arrived back safely with several Martian specimens. His wife, and that engineer Clay Reynolds; all seem to be in good spirits. . . . The world has acclaimed space travel. That means that air-borne travel and commerce will be slowly superseded by the newer, faster medium."

"But there will still be a need for air traffic!" Dilson, the Air Chief, said.

"Don't be a damned fool!" Doone snarled at him. "A need, yes—but what sort of a need? This man Ron Dawlish has a super fuel, manufactured somehow from minerals. It puts gasoline right out of the picture. Hear that, Meadows?" Doone grinned malignantly at the oil man. "He uses a new metal for his firing cylinders, and platinum bases for his ship's plates. That wipes our steel out. Hear that, Rolinac? So, our three interlocked interests—airplanes, steel, and oil are wiped out by this scientist who is in truth a one-man industrial revolution. And you, Pascal, as our banker, will feel the pinch, too. . . ."

DOONE clenched his hands behind his back. "Now you see why I

called you here. We're heading for being a second-rate power in world affairs: in fact I can even foresee total bankruptcy! The State itself is behind this Ron Dawlish, and so is the Science Institute. Interplanetary travel and super-fast fuels have come to stay. In a few months Dawlish's Corporation will be established and it is going to be a miracle if Air Line shares are going to be worth the paper they're written on."

There was a grim, deadly silence for a moment as each man, ruthlessly ambitious, saw his security crumbling before the winds of advancing science.

The silence was broken at last by the gradual crescendo of a band coming down Wall Street. Presently, the procession passed down the center of the street amidst the snow of ticker tape and the cheers of the packed people.

"Look at 'em!" Doone growled, glaring down on the superb automobile in which sat Clay, Ron, and Nancy, and beside them again the President himself and the white-haired chief of the Science Institute.

"Makes one wish for a bomb," the oil man muttered, rubbing his square jaw speculatively.

"Something violent, anyway," agreed Rolinac, his stomach pressing against the window ledge as he leaned to look.

Then Doone turned back irritably into the office and as a matter of course the other men turned with him. Seating himself at his desk he looked at them each in turn.

"We have got to act," he said, his venomous mouth setting. "And quickly! Violence is only to be our last resort because by its use we can get too easily involved with the law. To begin with it seems it is a job for you, Pascal."

The banker looked surprised. "Me?"

"You will get agents on the job to ca-

jole Ron Dawlish into parting with his formula. Never mind what you offer him, but *get* it. If that fails then try and work a partnership with our Corporation. Whatever happens we have got to know what that formula is, even if we only get a lease on it. Promise anything until we get it. When we *have* it the legal elimination of Dawlish can be arranged somehow."

The four heads nodded. After thinking for a moment or two Doone looked at the steel king.

"You control most of the country's steel output, Rolinac. Ron Dawlish will need it in big quantities to build his space ship factories. You will see to it that every hindrance short of getting at loggerheads with the State is put in the way of delivery. And when delivery has to take place I'm not particular if the steel isn't of a high-class grade. Understand? You, Meadows, will slow up all oil transactions. Dawlish will need oil in big quantities. He can't use anything except oil for trucks and Deisel engines."

The oil man nodded, but he looked troubled.

"What's wrong with you?" Doone asked harshly. "Afraid you may lose on the deal, or something?"

"Not exactly that. I was just thinking that Dawlish has mighty powerful influences back of him—even the President himself. We've got to be damned careful."

"I expect you to be," Doone retorted. "It's as much in your interests as everybody else's to see that Dawlish is smashed utterly—or if not that then to see that his formula is known to us as well as to himself. . . . As for you, Dilson, you'll launch the biggest publicity campaign ever, telling the masses that air travel is *proven* to be safe but that space travel is still experimental. Avoid the libel angle, but lay it on thick.

Understand?"

"I get it," Dilson nodded.

"And if these efforts fail?" the steel king asked.

"Then there are other ways." Doone smiled thinly. "Forceful ways, which one way or another, will give us back the security we have got to have. . . ."

CHAPTER III

IT WAS not long after the speechifying and feteing was over before Ron Dawlish began to feel the commercial pressures instigated by Doone—nor did he require much imagination to know the financier was back of them. But, aided as he was by Presidential and scientific support, he gradually succeeded, with Clay's help, in establishing the first of a series of spaceship factories. His actual headquarters were in New York itself. From here Ron controlled all the details, while Clay became the foreman of works.

Altogether, a couple of months after the return from Mars, Ron was feeling pretty satisfied with himself and fairly sure—so far at least—that he had beaten Calver Doone at his own game. Not that he had any illusions about Doone, however. . . .

"Whatever he does, Nan, he'll have to put a brake on his efforts," he said one evening, as he and the girl sat at dinner in the gathering summer twilight. "We've got all people for us and precious few against us—so he'll have to watch his step."

Nan nodded absently, but said nothing. Ron lowered his knife and fork for a moment and looked at her steadily.

"You look sort of tired, dear. Is this new place we took getting too large to handle?"

"With domestics and labor saving devices? Not a bit of it, Ron— Don't

mind me. I'm still trying to get over that space trip. I think it upset my nerves a good deal."

"And I've been—and shall be—too busy to console you," Ron sighed. Then he shrugged. "So there it is! But there's a fortune to be made, and one has to put a lot of things on one side for that, eh?"

She smiled an assent, handled her knife and fork with hands which were totally dead. Instead of her queer condition improving, as she had once hoped, it had gone worse with the weeks, spreading further about her body every day. And still she had kept from worrying Ron, loaded up as he was with responsibilities. But she had made up her mind to make a move this very night if Ron went out again to catch up on work at headquarters. . . .

Which he did, fifteen minutes later. He kissed her white cheek gently.

"Take care of yourself, sweet," he said softly. "Get to bed early and catch up on some sleep. Maybe you'll feel better then. 'By, Bouncer. . . ."

Bouncer stirred slumbrously for a moment, then went to sleep again. Ron looked at him with a frown.

"Seems damned dopy these days. . . . Well, I'll be back somewhere around midnight."

Nan watched him go as she stood at the window—then the moment his roadster had vanished down the drive she had Clements drive her to Dr. Andrews, the family physician since her birth twenty-five years before. In the surgery he listened with a puzzled frown as she explained her symptoms.

"And it is progressive? It gets worse?" And as she nodded his frown deepened.

"I'm getting to the limit of endurance, Dr. Andrews," she said hopelessly. "You see, I don't know if it will end in death, or what. My arms

and shoulders have been dead for weeks anyway, and now it is affecting my legs and feet. Yet the puzzling part is that I can use my limbs perfectly even though they have no sensation. I'm—I'm frightened; I really am!"

Andrews led her to a chair and switched on a battery of arcs. For a long time he examined her, testing reflexes, pulse, eyesight, hearing. At the end of it he was looking more puzzled than ever.

"I just don't understand it, Mrs. Dawlish," he confessed. "In all my medical experience you are unique! You are perfectly normal despite your lack of sensation. I can only assume something or other—maybe this Martian cactus you speak of—is affecting your sensory nerves and rendering them inoperative. Certainly it isn't a circulatory trouble. Your heartbeats and blood pressure are both normal."

NAN got to her feet slowly. "I see," she said quietly. "You can't advise me, then?"

"I might if you cared to stay in my sanitarium for a week or so."

"No, no, not that. I don't want to upset my husband for one thing . . . and anyway I might get well again. Thanks just the same."

Andrews held her coat for her, grasped the cold hand she held out. Thoughtful, bitter indeed, she pondered her strange malady as she was driven home. Still pondering, she entered the lounge—and came to a stop. For an instant she was shocked out of her own personal worries.

In the center of the rug, stirring in a kind of horrifying blind desperation, was Bouncer. Obviously he did not hear Nan's approach, nor did he see her even though his blank, terrible eyes were fixed upon her. Fear streamed through her as she looked at

him. It needed no more than a glance to see he was strangely, outrageously ill.

"Bouncer!" Nan's hands went to her lips in terror. "Oh, Bouncer, what is the matter?"

Instinct perhaps advised him of her nearness. He whimpered pitifully, lifted one paw, then the other, in a stiff sort of effort to reach her. She hesitated, uncertain what to do—then whirling round she whipped open the French window and shooed him out into the garden.

Blindly, he loped out into the moonlight. Nan watched him fixedly, stunned by the sight of strong summer grass wilting into sear dryness everywhere he wandered. In no time the lawn was streaked in a crazy patchwork of withered trails as though Death himself had walked there.

For a long time Nan could not rouse herself to grasp the situation. Her own symptoms, she knew, were identical with those of poor Bouncer, except for the fact that she, being stung much later by the Martian cactus, would naturally receive the effects with corresponding latency. But surely to God it didn't mean that she was to become a blind, desperate thing like Bouncer, stunned of all normal faculties and so diseased that everything living around instantly withered?

Dry lipped, she turned away—and it was at that very moment that her own sensations reached a climax. The moonlit grounds seemed to swirl dizzily as she was struck by a hammer blow of pain in the head. All sense of remaining feeling left her and she crashed helplessly to the carpet. . . .

It was as though she were dead. All sight, hearing, movement, and sensation had ceased. And yet she was alive, fully aware of the fact that she had fallen and was in the grip of an iron

paralysis. Then at last—she knew not how long after—there came a change. For the first time since the deadly malady had manifested itself she was conscious of returning sensation. It flowed like a steadily swelling tide through her veins. She knew once again that she had arms and legs and nerves. . . .

Hearing, sight, smell; they crept back upon her. She stirred a little, became aware of the fact that Bouncer was standing right beside her, licking her face furiously.

"Bouncer!" she whispered, clutching him. "Oh, Bouncer, isn't it wonderful? We're well again—!"

She sat up, gradually got to her feet and stood thinking. Bouncer headed for the garden again and Nan's eyes followed to where he had left those trails of destruction. She hesitated, reached out towards the bowl of full blown roses on the table.

She grasped one of them. . . . It withered into brown petals!

Suddenly there blazed across her mind the remembrance of a Martian inscription—"To Him to Whom Eternal Life is Given, He an Outcast Shall Become!" It was as though the truth had been yelled at her.

"Bouncer," she said slowly, as he came back to her, "you and me are alike! We don't hurt each other because we've each got the same complaint, whatever it is— We've got to go away quickly, and find out what's wrong. Ron mustn't see us—mustn't touch us. . . ."

She turned away quickly, reached for notepaper in the bureau. She wrote a brief note, left it with the manservant before he had the chance to contact her in any way, then she went up to her room and hastily packed some clothes. Only one other thing she included—the vacuum phial full of cac-

tus needles which she had retained from her Martian adventure. . . .

RON DAWLISH had completed his job of going over the plans for the next day's production schedule with Clay Reynolds, when the phone rang. Ron reached for it.

"Yeah? Dawlish speaking."

The voice from the other end was not a familiar one. Not only did Ron hear it in the receiver but Clay also through the relay speaker. His big, powerful face darkened as he listened.

"You won't know me, Dawlish, but that's beside the point. I'm just going to give you a little word of warning. You must be pretty well aware by now that certain factions are not going to allow you to exert absolute monopoly over that space fuel of yours."

"Why not call the 'certain factions' Calver Doone and done with it?" Ron snapped, looking significantly at Clay across the desk.

"Names are dangerous, Dawlish—on both sides. Up to now you have been smart enough to dodge a commercial embargo on your oil and steel supplies, and you've turned down the highest money offers for your formula. That was foolish of you, for any further obstinacy on your part is going to cost you dear."

"Listen, you—" Ron began savagely; but he was interrupted.

"You listen to me! You've a lot of power on your side; that's freely admitted, but most men start to squeal when their personal friends and relatives suffer."

"What in hell are you driving at?" Ron roared.

"I'll make it as plain as possible. Either you agree to enter into partnership with Strat-American Airways Corporation by midnight—that is in forty minutes—or things will start happen-

ing which will bring you such anguish of mind you'll be begging to surrender within a week! Forty minutes, Dawlish. I'll ring you back."

The line went dead. Ron stared bewilderedly at the receiver, then he slammed it back on its rest. Suddenly his fury exploded.

"Of all the damned, infernal impudence! Who in hell does he think he is, anyway? He can't get away with it, Clay! We'll have the authorities put the finger on Doone and Strat-American Airways before they know where they are—"

"How?" Clay demanded grimly. "We haven't an atom of proof beyond that phone call. Not a single thing we can pin on Doone personally even though we know he's back of it. But that warning was meant in earnest all right—and we've got to heed it."

"Like hell!"

Clay's big hand clutched Ron's arm across the desk.

"Listen, Ron, come to earth! We've got to think of something whereby we can gain time. Doone has agents everywhere—possibly even amongst our own staff. We can't tell—"

"Oh don't talk like an idiot!" Ron said hotly. He sprang to his feet and paced around savagely. Presently he stopped at the window and gazed out on the lighted canyon below. "One would think you want me to comply with Doone's wishes," he muttered. "I'd never have thought it of you, Clay."

Clay got up and came over to him, swung him round.

"You know me better than that, Ron. I said we'd got to gain time. Stall. Promise anything!"

"But why the devil should I? I'm out to fight Doone, not to kowtow to him. Do you think I care what he does to me?"

"I wasn't thinking of you. I'm thinking of Nan, for one thing—even myself for another. I'm not scared of anything Doone can do, but my elimination would lose you one trusted overseer, and well you know it."

"Wait a minute," Ron said wonderingly. "Do you think for one moment that Doone would dare to drag Nan into this—"

"Dare!" Clay laughed shortly. "He'd jump at the chance! He is too snaky to wipe you out personally, and besides that wouldn't do him any good because you've got the formula he wants. . . . That agent of his on the phone promised you plenty of anguish — That means making you comply because all those nearest and dearest to you will suffer if you don't! So—stall! Give Nan warning to leave town and hide somewhere; give me time to get on my guard— Then we'll pay Doone back in his own coin."

"I get it," Ron nodded, calming. "Sorry I blew up on you, Clay. For that matter there's nothing to stop me telling Nan right now to get away somewheres. Sooner she's on the way to safety the sooner my hands are untied."

He turned back to the phone and depressed the home number tally button. It was the voice of Meadows, the manservant, which answered.

"Oh, hallo there, Meadows? Sorry to get you up. Ask Mrs. Dawlish to com to the phone, will you?"

"I'm sorry, sir, that's impossible. Mrs. Dawlish has left—on a sudden visit, I gathered."

Clay looked in surprise towards the loud speaker.

"Left? For where?" Ron asked blankly.

"I don't know, sir. She left a letter for you and instructed me to see that you got it."

"Oh," Ron said, thinking. "Well, all right. I'll see to it."

He rang off and clenched his fist. "Clay, this can only mean one thing. Somehow she must have got wind of danger and cleared off anyway."

"I suppose so," Clay nodded slowly. "But it's queer she did not ring you up here."

"Not altogether. She never disturbs me if she can help it. Yes, that's it right enough," Ron went on. "And it means that my hands are untied far quicker than I had expected. If you are ready for anything that might happen I'm going to tell this agent of Doone's to go to the devil when he rings back again."

CLAY nodded a silent assent. After that he and Ron waited in comparative silence until the stipulated forty minutes had finally expired. Right on the tick the bell rang.

"Well, Dawlish, have you decided?"

"Yes, I've decided," Ron answered bitterly. "You can tell Doone I'm not afraid of him, you, or any of the damned set-up. See?"

"You're a fool, Dawlish, as you'll very soon find out—"

Ron cut him off savagely and got to his feet.

"I'm through listening to those kind of threats," he snapped, getting into his hat and coat. "I'd better be getting home and see what kind of a note Nan left for me— What are you going to do?"

"Stay here," Clay shrugged. "Way things are looking it seems advisable to me for one or other of us to be on duty all the time. We've a fight on our hands now, Ron. Doone will strain every nerve."

Ron nodded slowly, tightened his lips. "Okay—I'll be here by seven in the morning—and watch out for yourself."

With that he left and hurried out to his car. Inside ten minutes he was home, followed by the berobed and tousled manservant into the lounge. He handed over the letter Nan had written.

"Mrs. Dawlish left no other instruction than that I hand you this, sir," he said.

"Um," Ron said moodily, tearing the flap. "Anybody call or ring up my wife during the evening?"

"Not to my knowledge, Mr. Dawlish."

"Okay. You can get back to bed."

"Thank you, sir. Good night."

Ron didn't answer; he was too busy reading the letter—

"Dear Ron:

I know you'll forgive me, but I feel an urge to go away and rest up a bit. My nerves, as you know, have not been so good ever since we got back from Mars, and I feel I must rest. I'll stay at an hotel somewhere in the country: I'll have to let you know the address later on. I've taken Bouncer with me for company. Please don't mind, will you?

"Anyway, you'll have busy days ahead of you and maybe you will get along quicker if you know I'm trying to recuperate myself . . .

"Always yours,

"Nan."

"Queer," Ron muttered to himself, frowning. "But probably I'm worrying over nothing. Doesn't sound here as though she got any hints about Doone. Must be just coincidence . . ."

He thought for a moment. She had not explained why she had not used the phone. She hardly could, considering she had not wanted to argue the matter of her going. But it baffled Ron just the same.

At last he shoved the note in his pocket and stood staring at the rose bowl, plucked out the dead one and

wondered why Meadows had not seen it. Odd for that one rose to be dead and the rest of them flourishing . . .

Then as he stood twirling it in his fingers the phone rang. In a moment his troubled face lighted up. He lifted the receiver.

"Yes, yes, that you, Nan—?" Then he stopped and gave a grunt as the voice of the night watchman came over the wire from his city headquarters.

"You'd better come over at once, Mr. Dawlish. Something awful has gone and happened. It's Mr. Reynolds, sir. He's gone and fallen down the elevator shaft and—"

"He *what*?" Ron shouted hoarsely, coming to life and clutching the phone tightly. "What did you say?"

"I don't rightly know what happened, Mr. Dawlish. I was in the office doing a bit of tidying up when Mr. Reynolds got a call to go over to the factory. He said he'd come right away and went for the elevator. Next thing I heard was a scream— I found the elevator was at the top floor. Somebody must have planned it."

"Did you call the police?" Ron asked dully.

"No, sir. Matter of fact I didn't know what to do. I found Mr. Reynolds lying dead so I rang you up and—"

"All right," Ron interrupted him. "I'll be right over."

CHAPTER IV

WALTER MOORLAND, the real estate dictator of Newingham, a village "somewhere" outside of the city's boundaries, was distinctly puzzled by the woman in the veil who, accompanied by a Scotch terrier on a leash, arrived in his office the moment it was open the following morning.

"Good morning, madam!" He held

out a cordial hand, tried not to look slighted when it was ignored. With eyebrow raised he tried to pierce the veil to the features beyond. All he could see was a worn face and alabaster-white complexion.

"You have a villa for sale with six acres of land—just down the main road? Or rather just off it . . ."

"That's right, madam. I can assure you it is—"

"I'm not interested in the sales talk, thanks. What's the price?"

"Two thousand dollars."

"Have the deed of sale drawn up immediately," Nan said. "I'll write you out a check."

She pulled off her gloves and Moorland found himself gazing fascinatedly at her hands. Dead white they were, superbly manicured, but totally bloodless. Except for their smoothness he could have said they were the hands of a corpse.

"I have not much time," Nan said, looking up momentarily from writing the check.

"Eh? Oh, I'm sorry." Moorland came to himself with a start, busied himself with the details of the deed. Within ten minutes, bar the official stamping, the negotiation was complete. Moorland studied the check.

"Is the name—Dawlish?" he asked finally.

"Nancy Dawlish," Nan acknowledged. "Heard it before?"

"Somewheres, I think . . ." Moorland shrugged. "Not that it matters. I'll get you the keys . . ."

He brought them over from a pegged board and held them out. Nan said briefly,

"Drop them on the desk, please."

Staring at her he complied, then his jaw sagged a little as he noticed something. In reaching for them Nan's costume sleeve brushed the fresh sweet

peas on top of the desk. For some incredible reason they all turned black, then wilted into dryness. It was the most astounding thing Moorland had ever seen. Nan had seen it too and frowned in annoyance at herself. Then she straightened up and put the keys in her handbag. Her voice was quite composed.

"Thanks, Mr. Moorland. There is just one other thing . . ."

"Yes?" he whispered, staring at her in sober wonderment.

"If anybody should inquire as to my whereabouts—though I don't altogether expect it—you know nothing of me."

"Yes, yes, madam—of course. But look, can't I show you round the villa—?"

"Thank you, no. I've seen it already through the windows . . . Good morning."

Again Moorland found his proffered hand ignored, but as he pulled the door open for her her fingers, reaching for the knob, inadvertently touched his wrist. With a terrific effort he mastered a scream, smiled her out from a deadly pale face.

When he looked at his wrist a moment later the back of it had three white spots where she had touched him—spots ice cold to the tapping of his other hand. Ice cold and feelingless. He stared after her as she went down the pathway, then his gaze swung to the dead sweet peas . . . Suddenly he realized he was wet with perspiration. Death had come into his little office this morning—

WITHIN three days Nan had her villa duly furnished and fitted out, and everywhere she had been her strange manner and deliberate avoidance of contacting anybody had been noticeable. Only when at last she had settled in the place and locked the doors

on the outer world did she feel safe, and for that matter able to fully analyze the strange sensation that had been governing her ever since her recovery from the initial paralysis. To Bouncer she summed things up, and with a solemn black face he sat and listened.

"Bouncer, I think we know now what the Martians meant, don't we?" she whispered, stroking his head and staring moodily out of the window onto the countryside. "Only you and I can touch each other and still live—but to other living things, human, animal, or vegetable, we're deadliest poison . . . We're outcasts Bouncer. Eternal but damned!"

She smiled faintly. "Odd to think that we can live forever—and yet because of that very fact we must never touch anybody, never contact a living thing. But because we suffer from the same thing we're immune from each other . . ." Nan's face saddened as she thought of Ron. "Never, never must I see him again, Bouncer. That would mean his death . . ."

She stopped, reflecting. Once again she was swept by unfathomable emotions, those same emotions she had noticed so often lately. At first, upon her initial recovery from the paralysis, they had been unformed stirrings in her consciousness—dim, complex glimpses of a vast and overwhelming science. As she had been then, terrified at her physical condition, it had signified but little—but now she had realized the crushing fact that she and Bouncer were eternal outcasts in a world of the living she felt it was imperative to encourage these enigmatic conceptions struggling to be born.

Perhaps a heritage of some kind—a Martian heritage? As yet she did not know. The main obsession in her mind at the moment was to determine *why* she was eternal, and if possible find a

way to neutralize the terrifying bequest. Eternity, at the price of bringing death to everything else that lived, was the cruelest, most terrible of jests. If it came to that, why *did* she bring death to those that lived if her heritage was eternal life?

Her thoughts moved on to the realization that she needed a laboratory. If indeed eternity *was* her heritage, there were many scientific occupations with which she would have to fill up her lonely life.

Turning, she picked up the telephone directory, looked up the numbers of the nearest construction companies . . .

For nearly two weeks after the death of Clay Reynolds, which Ron had not the least doubt had been deliberately engineered—though it was impossible for him to find the exact culprit—there was a continuous series of mysterious happenings which came close to driving Ron to distraction.

In the first space ship factory which was under construction there was constant sabotage and bad workmanship. Time and again steel girders collapsed without warning, bringing a gradually mounting death roll among the workers. This in turn precipitated unrest, and in some cases blank refusal to work at all. Desperately Ron argued with the men but got little satisfaction; nor was it a matter which he could refer to the State for the workers had powerful labor combines on their side who fully supported their complaints.

On top of this things began to go wrong with the transports. One half of them found their gasoline tanks full of "treated" spirit. The great storage tanks were immediately examined and found to be full of doctored fuel.

BITTER, grim, Ron sent for the works manager. He had taken the place vacated by the highly efficient

Clay and Ron had felt at the initial interview that he was the right man for the task—big, husky, genial, intelligent . . .

He looked rather puzzled as he faced the haggard Ron across the desk.

"Look here, Benson, where did you buy that latest consignment of steel?" Ron demanded.

"Why, from Rolinac's Syndicate, sir."

Ron leaped up. "What! What the devil do you mean by taking things into your own hands in this fashion? Didn't I give you implicit instructions to get all steel from Meredith's?"

Benson was silent, his square jaw firming.

"And the gasoline?" Ron barked. "That, I suppose you got from Meadows' Oil Company?"

Benson shrugged. "Only because they're both the biggest men in the business. So I thought—"

"Your job is to act, not think! You'd better come clean, Benson, and admit that you're in the employ of Calver Doone—that you are here with the express intention of trying to wreck my space ship projects. That's right, isn't it?" Ron reached out and caught the works' manager by the lapel of his over-all.

"Okay, it's right." He grinned cynically. "And we're making a pretty good job of it, aren't we?"

Ron snatched his hand away. "Get out!" he blazed. "And stay out!"

Benson shrugged, then with a grim smile silently departed. For a moment or two Ron glared at the closed door bitterly, then sat down again at his desk. For several minutes he sat thinking, brows down, faced with ticklish problems. The worries connected with trying to start his space ship factories were legion—but back of his mind was a greater anxiety—the peculiar silence

of Nan after her promise to send him further word.

So thick and fast had his troubles piled upon him he had hardly noticed the lapse of time. Surely she must have found an hotel by *now*? Two weeks! That she hadn't sent him a single word or even phoned him was the oddest thing out. More, it was alarming. Perhaps a matter for the police —

"Excuse me, Mr. Dawlish—"

"Well, what is it?" He looked up with a start as a clerk came in.

"There's a Mr. Doone to see you, sir—"

"Calver Doone!"

"Do you mind so much, Mr. Dawlish?" Doone himself came in behind the clerk, hands clasped tightly behind his back. He only unclasped them to take off his hat and gloves.

"You can get out," he said, to the hesitant clerk.

"That might apply just as well to you, Doone," Ron said, glaring at him.

Doone's response was to sit down. He leaned back in the chair with an acid smile.

"Suppose we get down to business, Mr. Dawlish? I think that there is little doubt that I have you just where I want you."

"Yeah?" Ron gave a grim smile. "Killing off Clay Reynolds and fixing a phony works' manager isn't the end of the world, Doone."

Doone was silent while he lighted a cigarette.

"I was lucky enough to find out about your phony dealing in time," Ron went on savagely. "Inside two hours I'll have my own steel company—Meredith's—back on the job, and my tanks will be emptied and filled with first-grade gasoline."

"Somehow," Doone said calmly, "I think you're going to be disappointed."

"Meaning what?"

"I realized that I left too many loopholes before, my friend. There were too many independent sources from which you could buy steel and oil, too many sources from which to get the resources for space ship building. So I decided it would be worth my while to use every influence I possess to secure controlling interests in all concerns likely to be of use to you. I confess it has been an expensive job, but well worth the investment. By tomorrow at the latest the final ratification of a giant merger will take place."

"By God, Doone, if you mean—"

"I mean, Mr. Dawlish, that you are powerless!" the financier snapped. "Though the final signature will not be given until tomorrow the merger is in force and you cannot get away from its influence! Oil, steel, and base metal industries are nominally unchanged so far as outside orders are affected—but where *your* contracts are concerned *special* attention will be given. Do I make myself clear?"

DOONE leaned forward and slapped a thin hand on the desk. "You are cornered, Dawlish! You will only get the right materials and smoothly executed contracts when you cooperate with me—not until! And it isn't just me that you are fighting now but the commercial dictators of the day."

"Of which you are the supreme one," Ron breathed, clenching his fists. "Everybody knows you are pretty well the master mind that tells Wall Street what to do. Well, you're not getting that formula of mine! I'll get through if I have to drill for my own gasoline, mine my own ores, and build the factories nail by nail. I didn't brave a space ship journey to Mars just to hand the formula to you. When a Space Corporation comes into being *I* will be the President of it. Make no mistake!"

"This is all very futile with the commercial giants against you, Dawlish."

"Not so foolish with the President and the Science Institute backing my project. This isn't a two-cent discovery, Doone: it is the biggest thing since man learned to fly."

"I know," Doone said grimly. "Why else do you think I am spending millions to crush you? If you succeed, I collapse. I'm fighting for my life."

"If you and your commercial cronies were anything like men of vision instead of public-frisking moneymakers, I'd agree to compromise," Ron snapped. "But I'll have no truck with men who use murder and sabotage as their weapons. . . ."

Doone reflected. "Clay Reynolds died, didn't he? That was a personal blow to you. It would be most unfortunate if the same thing were to happen—to another even dearer to you. . . ."

Ron stared at the snakelike eyes. Nan! Of course! What an idiot he had been not to have seen it before. Gone away for her nerves indeed! Of course Doone had been behind her disappearance. No wonder she had sent no word. Somehow he had forced her to write that letter and—

"So you are responsible!" Ron blazed, leaping up. "You dirty, cheap gangster! *You* kidnapped my wife to force my hand!"

It said much for Doone's imperturbability that he made instant use of the obvious mistaken conclusion.

"I warned you, didn't I?" he said gravely. "Or rather I *had* you warned that worse blows might befall you. At the moment your wife is safe. Her continued well being depends entirely on you."

Ron beat his fist on the desk. "At least give me time to think about it!"

"But why?" Time was the last thing

Doone could grant in case the mistake was discovered. "I've shown you what I can do, and what I will continue to do. Either you surrender that formula to me *now*, or you'll never hear of your wife again and your potential Corporation will never materialize."

Ron hesitated, then with a hopeless gesture he turned to the private safe in the wall. . . .

CHAPTER V

IN TWO weeks events had moved swiftly for Nan also. Though she had not understood at the time *why* she had such scientific powers, she certainly had had no difficulty in using them. First she had set about gratifying her longing to see the outer world by constructing a tele-detector. Tuned to the electrical aura of any human being it automatically contacted any desired person the moment its detector beam was switched on.

To build the instrument, once she had ordered the components from various electrical firms, had taken her only three days. Immediately she had directed the X-ray-like beam towards Ron's headquarters in the city and finally, picking him up, had noted his aura frequency. From then on the instrument had—and would—pick him up the moment it operated. . . .

For several days it had worried Nan to see and know of his anxieties on her account, to hear his words of harassment—but still dead silence on her part was necessary if she was to keep him away from his own destruction.

Most of her time she sat watching and listening to his shadow self on the big screen. At other times she took a bit of exercise on the land at the back with Bouncer; or else she studied the cactus barbs which had brought her and the dog to such a strange pass. . . .

And, with her newly conferred knowledge, she began not only to understand the nature of the barbs but the cause of her condition. When she finally withdrew a drop of blood from her finger and studied it she knew her deductions were right.

"Bouncer," she said, on the evening two weeks after they had fled from home, "I know what's wrong with us. . . . In a world as barren as Mars and devoid of all water vapor, the only vegetation that could survive must be of the evergreen variety, its inner chemical structure breaking down the molecules in the dry sand and transforming them into a substance capable of supporting life—just the same way as an earthly plant breaks down poisonous nitrates and turns them into stimulants. . . .

"It is possible—in fact probable—that the Martians realized that if a plant had the power of achieving eternal life on a dying planet, so might a human being—or at least a flesh and blood being. The Martians must have utilized the plant sap and then discovered, too late, its effect on the flesh and blood system. . . ."

Nan paused and thought for a moment, then went on absently,

"You see, Bouncer, I think we may assume the Martians were flesh and blood like we of Earth, only with different anatomies. At any rate, I think **their** bloodstream must have corresponded with ours. See this drop of milky white on the microscope slide? **It's my blood, Bouncer—and yours must look the same.** The red corpuscles have been destroyed. Normally that would lead to extreme anemia, even death, and it was while this process was going on that we lost all sensation. But the poison of the Martian cactus supplied something else in place of the red corpuscles—a colorless fluid

which is immensely powerful and readily assimilates into the bloodstream, finally turning the blood into a fluid incapable of deterioration. Because of that, ketabolism is absent and cellular breakdown cannot occur. The body is literally filled with the elixir of life. . . ."

Nan stopped, and with a sad smile fondled the dog's head.

"But for the gift of eternity there is a dreadful price—one which the Martians discovered, hence their warning over that archway. You see, Nature must have a balance. Birth, maturity, and decay are the law of the physical world. Eternity is an outrage on Nature. All things live, Bouncer, because they are interdependent one on another. A living unit—an *ordinary* living unit—cannot exist unto itself: that is a fundamental law of science. And if living things are brought into contact with something which is possessed of full life-force—like you and me—the immense shock does not stimulate, it destroys! Just as some radiations are stimulating in small quantities and deadly in large quantities. The plants themselves had only their needles with which to transmit the deadly force, so we were not killed by it, but absorbed it.

"But we have our whole bodies radiating it. We stimulate all living things into instant death. Now we know what is meant by that Martian inscription. . . . And my scientific knowledge? At first I suspected it was some kind of heritage. Now I know differently. The brain, Bouncer, is fed by the bloodstream. According to the quality of that stream the brain is keen or dull. But now your brain and mine is fed with a non-deteriorating fluid, sharpening them in every respect. Normally I was a fair scientist: with this new bloodstream I am almost a genius.

I am capable of learning and mastering problems that would have been beyond my capacity before. In time, Bouncer, as years go on, I may become the greatest scientist that ever lived. . . . And why not indeed, with all eternity in which to accomplish it . . . ?

"But we face a terrible ordeal, Bouncer," Nan sighed. "To be separated forever from living beings. . . . What is there left throughout eternal life but to study and master the mysteries of science? Thereby we might find the way to either the blessed touch of a human being, or maybe . . . death."

With a fatalistic shrug she turned and switched on the teledetector. In a moment or two Ron became visible. Nan started to attention as she saw Calver Doone seated opposite to him at the desk.

"... you are responsible!" Ron shouted. "You dirty, cheap gangster! *You* kidnapped my wife to force my hand!"

NAN watched and listened grimly to the words exchanged. She got up with a futile cry of warning as Ron went over to his wall safe and tossed down his precious formula into the desk.

"Well, there it is, Doone," he snapped. "I'll risk anything and I'll face anything—except the chance of my wife's death or injury. You found the Achilles Heel, damn you!"

Doone picked up the formula, surveyed it, and nodded.

"You're a sensible man, Dawlish. But I won't be hard on you. I suggest a partnership—"

"Yeah, with you in control? Nothing doing! I shall found my own organization and you yours. Whoever gets the biggest space service has their own ingenuity to thank. . . ."

"No," Nan whispered. "No, Ron, not that! You're just ruining yourself— You know you are!"

She stood helplessly for a moment, picked up the phone, then hesitated. The number could be traced. She turned, bundled on her hat and coat, and raced from the villa with Bouncer at her heels. In five minutes she had reached a call box and dialed hurriedly.

In his office Ron broke off his conversation with Doone to lift the receiver. He sat listening, Doone watching the expressions chasing across his face.

"But where *are* you?" Ron demanded at last. "I've been trying to trace you. Even the bank wouldn't help because your separate account is wrapped in mystery— Hey, wait a minute—!"

He broke off savagely, joggled the rest. Then suddenly flinging the phone down he reached over the desk and grabbed Doone by the collar, yanked him out of his chair. With his free hand he whipped the formula from the financier's breast pocket.

"Clever, weren't you?" he asked furiously. "That was my wife on the phone. You *didn't* kidnap her. I jumped to conclusions . . ."

"You're only a bit ahead of time that's all," Doone said dryly. "I'll get her somehow, Dawlish, I promise you—"

"My wife is safe," Ron interrupted. "Though she is absent for a reason I don't understand. You haven't got my formula and you won't ever get the chance again . . . Now get out!"

For a long moment Doone hesitated, then he turned and left. Once he got home he spent an hour in his library finishing off new plans of attack and the final details of his merger on the morrow. Then he retired to bed.

It was towards two in the morning

when he fancied he heard a noise in his magnificent bedroom. Sharply, he sat up, reached for the bedside lamp and switched it on.

The sudden glare revealed a dead white hand reaching towards him from the shadows back of his bed. He fancied that for a moment he caught a glimpse of a veiled face and heard the sullen growling of a dog—

Then the hand gripped his wrist. Consciousness, life, all conception of things, streamed out of him in a tide . . .

RON stayed at his headquarters for the rest of the night, laying plans just as Doone had done for defending himself against the attacks which would undoubtedly be launched against him commercially. He needed a fresh and trusted foreman, contact with oil and steel companies who had escaped the full sweep of Doone's brush—These, he felt, were problems which could be best solved by appealing for State aid. In any case this was still a secondary anxiety. Nan was the real trouble. He *had* to find her.

He tried to trace her phone call, but since it had been on the automatic this was impossible. Regardless of the fact that it was early morning he rang up all her friends in the hope of getting a clue. All he did get were grumbles for being so inconsiderate.

Finally, when dawn had come, he gave it up for the time being. He had a shave, got into his car, then went out to breakfast. When he opened the morning paper he suddenly found the worst problem of his life lying solved before his eyes.

The headlines in themselves were enough—THREE MAGNATES DIE!

Astounded, his breakfast forgotten, he read the columns. There was a wealth of sensational detail, but the

main facts which stood out were that Doone; Rolinac, the steel king; and Meadows, the oil czar, had all died during the night. Struck by the coincidence of the deaths, the police had investigated. Apparently death in each case was due to heart failure—but why had each victim a leprous white mark on his wrist? Foul play?

At any rate the police were anxious to trace a veiled woman with a Scotch terrier whom Officer 796 had followed from the oil king's residence to Newingham village outskirts, then he'd lost sight of her in the mists . . .

"Nan!" Ron whispered stupidly. "It must be her—with Bouncer. But what in God's name has she been up to. . . ?"

The fact that his chief enemies had been wiped out, and before that merger could be ratified, was purely the background to the much greater riddle of Nan. Newingham village? Ron set about his breakfast hurriedly, called the waitress to him and got the whereabouts of the village from her.

Ten minutes later he was heading in his car out of the city. Now and again, as he dodged in and out of the traffic, he wondered if the big blue sedan in his rear was merely taking the same road by chance. His wonder deepened into suspicion when he swept along the quiet road leading to the open country.

All the way the car followed at a respectable distance, and to dodge it was impossible if he was to find Newingham. When at last he did arrive he pulled up outside the post office. All inquiry concerning Nan drew blank.

"But of course," the postmaster added, "you might try Moorland, the house agent . . ."

Ron did, and by skillful pumping learned all he needed to know, even about the wilted flowers. It brought recollections of a dead rose to his mind,

and with it a profound bewilderment. Something was decidedly wrong somewhere.

Jumping into his car he drove on again. About two miles down the road, Moorland had said. Or rather just off the road itself in a side lane— And immediately that blue sedan came into view once more on Ron's rear mirror. He put on speed, but couldn't shake it off, then he forgot all about it for the moment as the house he wanted loomed into view, almost isolated in fields.

Bumping and bounding his car went speeding along a rough path. As he came nearer he could see a slim figure outside the villa, playing with a dog. Suddenly she must have seen him for she stopped and looked up—

Ron put on speed, only to find he was nearly involved in a collision as the blue sedan put on a sudden spurt and swerved right across his track. He jammed on the brakes and waited grimly. Four men, each armed with revolvers, tumbled out of the blue car and came walking towards him.

"Okay, Dawlish," the leader said, through the open side window; "the ride's over. Out you get!"

Powerless to do otherwise Ron obeyed, found the gun jabbed in his ribs.

"Time to settle accounts, feller," the trigger man explained. "Somehow you managed to get Doone, then you wiped out the oil and steel men just to make yourself safe. You had a woman do it according to the police. Our orders from Doone's agents were to see where the woman was and then get the pair of you, see? That's why we followed you . . . And I guess that's her, eh?"

RON glanced up in a mixture of relief and alarm as he saw Nan and Bouncer coming slowly along the dusty lane. He stared at her. Her deathly

white pallor; how strange she looked . . .

"Better finish this guy before he warns her," one of the men said, and brought up his gun. Before Ron had the slightest chance to utter a word, savage anguish tore into his chest. It came again, with even more excruciating force . . .

He dropped into the dust, groaning.

"Hey Slug, I don't like this," whispered the one who'd taken aim and fired at the girl. "She don't seem to be hurt—"

"You're not aiming straight, that's why," Slug retorted. "I got this guy didn't I?" He kicked the prostrate Ron, then steadying his own revolver he fired point blank at the oncoming girl. In fact he fired twice in quick succession, and he knew he was too good a marksman to miss . . . but still she came on.

"Hell!" he whispered dazedly, his throat dry; then with a sudden premonition of the supernatural he dived for the car with his fellow gangsters beside him. The girl had just reached the car door as Slug jammed his foot on the accelerator and drove hell for leather down the lane towards the roadway.

Nan stared at the settling cloud of dust, then back to where Ron was weakly beckoning her.

"Nan dearest—give me a hand!"

She came nearer and looked down upon him tensely, holding Bouncer away by his collar. Ron stared up through pain-glazed eyes.

"Nan, what is it? What have I done? Why don't you help me—?"

"Oh, Ron, I dare not! Don't you understand? I dare not touch you—nor dare Bouncer. If only I'd had the tele detector on I'd have known you were coming this way and would have left—. But I never even guessed.

We're outcasts, Ron. Eternal—and deadly!”

“I don't get it,” he said huskily, clutching his reddened shirt front.

The story came from her in a torrent. At the end of it Ron was deathly silent, gulping for breath at intervals. Then he essayed words again.

“Looks like the Martian—trip didn't do us—much good, eh?” He gave a ghastly smile. “You became an outcast and I got death.”

“No, Ron, you can't—”

“I'm a gonner, Nan,” he said in a whisper. “A pity, because the path is clear now that you bumped off Doone and his cronies— Nan, you've got to take it on. You must! Build up an interstellar empire. Somehow! Despite this deadly ailment of yours . . .

Promise—promise me you will.”

“I will, somehow,” she said quietly.

He relaxed. “Good. I—I thought I could count on you. And—with eternity you can make—a grand job of it. Only one thing more— A kiss! I beg of you! I can't stand this any more . . .”

She hesitated, then came forward and went on her knees, her face close to his.

“Let me die with that sweet memory,” he muttered.

She stooped until her lips touched his. When, a moment later, she looked down on the white, cold being in the dust she realized more clearly than ever before that the future was hers alone, to mold scientifically to her will . . .

« LIFE SPAN »

ALTHOUGH Americans have always pointed with pride to our high standards of living and our greatly increased span of life, there are still two countries where the life span exceeds ours. According to statistics published by the Canadian Bureau of Statistics, a Canadian lad five years of age can expect to live approximately 62½ years, and an English boy has 60 years to live, while our American boy can only expect about 59½ more years.

There were several other very interesting statistics published also. Only two countries—Holland and Denmark—showed a lower male death rate in the ages between 25 and 45 than that found in Canada.

A tabulation with other nation's death rates among five-year-old boys showed that compared with a Canadian boy, an Italian boy showed a 39 per cent greater chance of dying, a Japanese boy about 169 per cent, and an East Indian boy the highest chance of 637 per cent greater.

The fact that medical science has been able to prevent a great amount of illness among young people as well as successfully cure a great percentage of those cases that do occur, has greatly reduced the mortality of younger ages.

Another rather interesting factor to note is that although the average life span has been greatly increased, the number of people to live a complete century has not increased in the past hundred years.

« WIFE AUCTION »

AMONG the ancient Babylonians, the marriage problem was no problem at all. When the girls had reached the age of marriage prescribed by the Babylonian laws, they journeyed to the marriage mart where the young men of the country were waiting to get their wives.

The auction was a very novel arrangement. The first girls to be auctioned were always the most beautiful ones in the lot and always captured the highest prices. This, however, put the poor young men at a disadvantage since they could not afford to bid for the pretty girls and they had no desire to pay for an ugly bride. And so the wise men of Babylonia decided to remedy the situation. They decided that the money brought in from the sale of the pretty girls should be divided up into dowries for the ugly girls. The worse-looking the girl, the greater her dowry was to be. Thus the young men bid for the pretty girls and were bribed to marry the others.

The fathers could not marry their daughters off in any other manner and once a sale was made the young man must promise marriage to his young lady. However, the law did provide that if both parties were not agreeable to marriage, either the purchase price or dowry must be returned and both young man and lady would wait for the next auction.

All-in-all the auctions worked very well and cut down the rate of old maids and bachelors to a minimum.

ROMANCE OF THE ELEMENTS—LEAD



"SAVE THE SURFACE"

WAS A SLOGAN BELIEVED IN BY THE BELLES OF ANCIENT GREECE WHO PLASTERED THEIR FACES WITH WHITE LEAD COSMETICS. TODAY WE USE WHITE LEAD IN PAINT TO "SAVE THE SURFACE" OF STRUCTURES.

WHITE LEAD COMPOUNDS ONCE SERVED AS HAIR-WASHES, AND EYE-SALVES; FOR REMOVING BLEMISHES

TRYING TO TRANSMUTE LEAD INTO GOLD WAS A FAVORITE INDOOR SPORT OF MEDIAEVAL ALCHEMISTS ☆☆☆☆ **ROMANS** USED LEAD TO MAKE WATER PIPES, COOKING UTENSILS AND COFFINS; FOR SLING BOLTS AND ARROW TIPS. THEY SOLDERED WITH TIN-LEAD ALLOYS. ANCIENT DENTISTS BUILT UP HOLLOW TEETH WITH LEAD FILLINGS—THEN YANKED THEM !!



Early
ENGLISH "PLUMBERS" WERE ROOFERS WHO PUT LEAD ROOFS ON MEDIAEVAL BUILDINGS. BEING WORKERS IN LEAD ("PLUMB") THEY MADE LEAD STATUES, LEADED STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, BUILT CISTERNS INSTALLED WATER PIPES...

ADD SMALL PINCHES OF BARIUM, CALCIUM AND SEVERAL OTHER ELEMENTS, TO LEAD, AND IT RINGS LIKE A CLEAR BELL WHEN STRUCK! YET LEAD, UNALLOYED IS AS VIBRATIONLESS AS PUTTY—HENCE IDEAL FOR ORGAN PIPES. A BIG-TIME LEAD USE IS FOR GLAZING POTTERY; THE FINEST, CLEAREST TABLE GLASS CONTAINS UP TO 70% LEAD. IMPORTANT INDUSTRIAL USES ARE IN THE BEARINGS OF ENGINES; FOR TYPE METAL; IN SHEATHINGS FOR UNDERGROUND CABLES,

L EAD is number 82 in the International Table of Atomic Weights. Its symbol is Pb, and its atomic weight is 207.20. It is a silvery white metal with a density of 11.4 and a melting point of 327°. It is soft and malleable, and while warm, may be fashioned into pipes by means of hydraulic pressure. It occurs principally in the ore of galena. It unites readily with almost all other metals. It enters into many compounds.

NEXT MONTH—The Romance of Magnesium

When DESTINY Dealt

by P. F. COSTELLO

It was strange indeed that the backs of these cards held the pictures of real people—but could the old crone really foretell their fate by shuffling the deck?

ON the lane leading to the main entrance of Morris Bros. Mammoth Circus there was a small tattered tent in front of which crouched an incredibly aged, wrinkled and dirty crone.

Marie Carillo noticed the tent and the woman as she was returning from

her afternoon walk. She stopped and turned to the sullen, powerfully built young man who was walking beside her.

"Look, Manrico," she said, a note of surprise in her voice, "this tent and the old hag were not here when we walked by an hour ago. She is not part of the circus, is she?"

The young man glanced at the tent without curiosity. His brown face was



There were faces on
these cards; faces of
buffoons, and of a
beautiful woman...



impassive, but when he looked back to the girl at his side his flashing eyes betrayed his inner longing.

"What does it matter?" he murmured. "When we have only an hour a day together must we waste it in idle speculation?"

The girl glanced about nervously.

"Such talk is dangerous, Manrico. Supposing someone should hear you? My husband, perhaps."

"Your husband is a fool." Manrico spoke passionately. "He doesn't know the meaning of love. When I have you I will show you how a man should love a woman."

"Please," Marie Carillo said breathlessly. "You mustn't speak of such things. My husband will never let me go. I am afraid, even now, that he is becoming suspicious of us. If he does he will discharge you from our act."

Manrico laughed contemptuously.

"The Laughing Carillos would be finished then," he sneered. "Where could he find another trapeze artist to work with him? I stay only to be near you, my sweet."

THE couple had paused before the small tent which had provoked their discussion and the wrinkled old crone was regarding them with steady, unwinking brown eyes.

They were an attractive pair, she as slim and graceful as he was powerful and large, and the old woman nodded her head slowly as she appraised them. Years of work on high trapezes had given their bodies a fluidity and grace that was evident in their every action. He wore a white silk shirt, open at the throat, and the perfect muscles of his torso rippled under the light covering each time he moved his arms. The girl wore a mannish coat over her slim square shoulders, and except for the darkness of her coloring she might have

been another Diana, tall, proudly straight and superbly beautiful.

The old crone drew a deck of cards from her dirty red and white wrapper and grinned toothlessly at the couple standing before her tent.

"Your destiny is in the cards," she mumbled. "Death, love, hate and birth all reveal their secrets in the pattern of the cards."

Manrico looked down at the woman in irritation.

"Shut up, you old hag," he snapped.

"Please, Manrico, let us have our fortunes told by the old woman," Marie said. She smiled at him coaxingly. "Please, it would make me happy."

"All right," Manrico sighed. He turned to the old woman, who had scrambled to her feet at Marie's words.

"The *Senora* wishes her fortune told," he said. "We do not have much time."

The ancient seer grinned in acquiescence. With a clumsy parody of a bow she proceeded them into the small hot tent. She seated herself behind a table in the center of the tent and motioned them to take seats on the opposite side.

"This is a great deal of foolishness," Manrico said.

Marie gripped his arm suddenly. She pointed to the cards the woman was spreading over the table.

"Look," she whispered. "The backs of the cards—"

"What is so remarkable?"

"The clown faces on the backs of the cards," Marie said, a little breathlessly. "Some of the faces are laughing, some are crying—"

The old crone looked up at Marie.

"That is life. Some cry, some laugh," she said.

"But—"

"My sweet," Manrico said irritably, "you are amazed at the clowns. Why? Because we wear clown suits during

our performance?"

"Yes. That is why. It seems—somehow peculiar. As if these cards were *really* made for us."

"Nonsense," Manrico said. "They are an ordinary deck of cards. You could buy a thousand packs like them within fifty feet of this tent."

THE old crone smiled at his words and shook her head, almost sadly. She drew a card from the deck and shoved it toward the girl.

Marie studied the card and a flush of excitement stained her cheeks. The picture on the back of the card was that of a beautiful girl, head thrown back, hair streaming. And there was a small heart-shaped beauty mark under her left eye.

"Manrico," she whispered tensely. "This girl on the picture—*it is me!*"

Her hand strayed automatically to her cheeks and her fingers wonderingly touched the small, heart-shaped birth mark under her own left eye.

Manrico stared at the card for a long moment and then he glanced at Marie. There was a worried look in his eye and a dark frown clouded his features.

"It is some trick," he growled uneasily. He turned angrily to the old crone. "Where did you get that picture?"

The old woman grinned toothlessly and shrugged her shapeless shoulders. She began a rapid shuffling of the cards, her dirty, claw-like fingers moving with flashing dexterity.

Marie watched the cards anxiously and there was a strange excitement in her eyes.

"I feel so strange," she whispered to Manrico. "Something inside me seems to be crying out a warning."

The woman dealt the cards rapidly into three piles, faces up. Then she assembled them into a geometric pat-

tern on the table, mumbling strange, unintelligible words to herself as she did so.

When all the cards were arranged the woman stared at them for a long minute and then shook her head worriedly and scooped them up in her gnarled old hands.

"No, no," she muttered. "It cannot be."

"What's the matter?" Marie demanded.

The woman didn't answer. She shook her head from side to side and began redistributing them again. When she had completed the pattern the second time she looked from Manrico to Marie and there was a fearful doubt in her eyes.

"It is the same," she said, in a voice that was little more than a croak. "There can be no mistake. The cards of destiny do not lie. There is blackness ahead."

"What does that mean?" Marie asked.

The crone swayed from side to side and her voice was barely a croon as she muttered, "Death, death."

MANRICO stood up angrily.

"Are you trying to frighten the *Senora?*" he cried.

"*Senora?*" the old woman repeated. A sharp bright light glinted in her shifting eyes. "You are married?" she demanded of Marie.

"Yes."

"To him?" she indicated Manrico with a long bony finger.

Marie's cheeks grew hot.

"No."

"But you are lovers?"

Manrico took Marie's arm. "Come," he said. "This old fool talks too much."

"No," Marie said. "I want to hear what she has to say."

"The cards indicate another man," the crone said. "A tall fair man. For him, is the blackness."

Marie drew a sharp breath. "Tony!" she whispered.

"He will die. His time is soon. The blackness is near."

Marie shivered, although the tent was uncomfortably warm.

"I—I think we must go," she whispered to Manrico.

But Manrico's cheeks were now flushed with excitement.

"Not yet," he said sharply. "This was your idea. Now we will hear her out. What else is there in the cards, mother?"

Again there was doubt visible on the old woman's withered face.

"It is not all clear," she murmured.

"What is there for the *Senora* and me?" Manrico persisted.

"Love."

"And life?" Manrico demanded.

"It is not clear," the old woman mumbled. She rocked from side to side and ruffled the cards with uncertain fingers.

Manrico mopped his damp brow, noticing as he did so, that his hands were trembling.

"Will—the other man die first?" he asked.

The old woman nodded emphatically.

Manrico sat down and a flood of relief surged through him. His hand found Marie's and he pressed it tightly.

"And for us?" he asked again.

"Each other's arms," the crone replied. "Until death separates you."

As the woman spoke she gathered the cards together and stood up. Manrico led Marie from the tent and then turned to pay the old woman, but she waved him away, almost angrily.

Manrico shrugged and put the money back in his pocket. As they walked toward the main gate of the circus they

said little to each other. Manrico's thoughts were boiling furiously and beneath his impassive exterior he was raging with repressed excitement.

WHEN they passed the gate and entered the grounds of the circus he stopped and took Marie's shoulders in his powerful hands.

"You heard what she said?" he demanded.

"Yes," Marie answered, "I heard."

"Then why must we wait any longer? He is going to die; that old witch said so. There is no reason to stay with him. You must tell him now that you are leaving him."

His hands dug into the girl's shoulders and his eyes blazed into hers with an almost hypnotic force.

"Maybe the old woman was lying," Marie said desperately.

"She knew of Tony," Manrico said harshly. "She knew of us. The card with your likeness is proof of her powers. Maybe she's in league with the Black One, but I'd gamble my soul that she has told us the truth."

"All right, Manrico," Marie said, a little breathlessly. "I—I will go to him and tell him that I am leaving. But you must come with me. I cannot face him alone."

"I will come with you," Manrico said savagely. "He is in his tent now, preparing for our act tonight."

He took the girl's arm and strode toward a long line of performers' tents, almost dragging the girl in his haste. At a tent with an insignia of three laughing clowns stitched to the main flap, he halted.

"He is inside," he said. "There is no time to waste."

"Manrico, I am afraid."

"You fool!" Manrico burst out savagely.

He jerked aside the flap of the tent

and shoved the girl forward.

"We have wasted enough time as it is. This thing must be done now or not at all."

The girl stepped into the tent, her face white and strained. Manrico followed her.

At a littered dressing table in the tent, a tall, blond man was applying make-up. He looked around at Marie and Manrico.

"You've been gone quite a while," he said. "We're due for the Grand March in another hour, you know."

"I know," Marie said. She twisted her hands together anxiously and glanced up at Manrico in mute appeal, but she received no comfort from his stony, impassive face.

"There's something I want to tell you, Tony," she said.

Tony, her husband, turned back to his dressing table and inspected his lean face in the mirror. He had applied the white paint in an inch-wide streak about his mouth and it lent a ludicrous appearance to his pale, finely drawn face.

"We haven't time to talk," he said. "You can tell me later."

He stood up from the table and straightened the blouse of the baggy clown suit he was wearing.

"No," Marie said, "I can't tell you later. You must listen now."

HER husband turned and faced her and his eyes moved slowly from her to Manrico. There was a lurking fear in his eyes, now. The subconscious, instinctive fear of a man who has steeled himself for grief but who has a horrible dread of its arrival.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Manrico and I love each other," Marie said quietly. "I intend to marry him. You must give me my freedom."

There was a complete and terrible

silence in the room and her words seemed to echo endlessly, beating against the brains of the three people in the tent.

Her husband stared wildly at her and his eyes were black and hot against the whiteness of his face. He started to speak but no words passed his lips. His mouth twisted with his effort and the line of white grease paint spread and writhed in a pitifully comical fashion.

Manrico stood with his arms folded over his deep chest, his face expressionless.

"Well," Marie said, a touch of irritation in her voice, "aren't you going to say something?"

Her husband seemed not to hear the words. He sank slowly down on the stool before the dressing table, and his shapeless clown suit seemed to collapse about his shoulders. His features twisted as if he were in physical pain.

He said slowly, "I love you, Marie."

"If you do," Marie said, "you must want me to be happy. And I love Manrico. I can't be happy without him. You must let me go."

"No," he said. His voice was strained and harsh. "No."

Marie smiled slightly. His pain and helplessness at the prospect of losing her increased her confidence and gave her a feeling of power.

She said, "You can't keep me. I didn't know the meaning of love when I married you. I know now that I never loved you, not even for a day."

She was slightly shocked at hearing her own words, for she realized that she was saying things with the deliberate intention of hurting him.

He looked at her with haggard, pleading eyes.

"You don't know what you're saying, Marie," he said hoarsely.

"She knows perfectly well what she's

saying," Manrico said coldly. "She is in love with me and I am in love with her. We have been, for over a year. And nothing is going to keep us apart."

"I will not let you go," Tony said dully. He seemed as a man in a trance. His powerful hands were twisted together until the knuckles gleamed whitely in the semi-darkness of the tent.

"I will not let you go," he repeated.

Manrico's face reddened in anger.

"This is not the twelfth century," he said stormily. "Marie is not your slave."

Tony did not seem to hear. His head was bowed and his face was as hard as carved wood.

"There's no use talking," Marie said, turning helplessly to Manrico.

Manrico put his arm around her waist and led her to the tent flap. He glanced back at Tony and saw that he was reaching blindly, automatically, for a bottle of whisky on the dressing table.

He smiled grimly and followed Marie from the tent.

THEY walked a dozen yards in silence and Manrico watched Marie closely, a speculative, musing smile on his lips.

Finally he said, "Well, where does this leave us?"

Marie shook her head impatiently.

"I don't know. He's in one of his moods. Nothing can ever change him now."

"That's where you're wrong," Manrico said cryptically.

"You don't know him as I do," Marie said. "His will is like iron. Oh, I don't know what to think or do."

Manrico glanced about to make sure there was no one within earshot. Satisfied, he turned to Marie and his smile was not pleasant.

"You are wrong when you say that nothing will change Tony," he said. He looked steadily into the girl's eyes and the grim smile on his face faded to a cruel determination. "Death will change him."

"Manrico!" Marie gasped.

"Yes, death!" Manrico said softly. "While he lives he will always stand between us. He must die! Have you forgotten? His death was foretold in our cards. It makes no difference whether it occurs tonight or twenty years from now. That is destiny. Only to us does it make a difference. Whether we will be together in happiness or split apart forever by his selfishness depends on whether he lives or dies."

"But it isn't right," Marie protested fearfully. "It would be mur—"

"Don't say it, sweet," Manrico said softly. "We will only be fulfilling the designs of destiny. Didn't the cards promise us each other's arms until death separated us? We cannot fulfil that fate until he is forever out of the way."

"It's dangerous. Something might —"

"There's no element of danger in the plan I have figured out. Tonight there will be an accident during the act. A very unfortunate accident that will cost Tony Carillo his life. It will be as simple as falling off a high trapeze," he added with grim humor.

"How can you be sure this 'accident' will take place?"

Manrico smiled faintly.

"Leave that to me. In our first act he leaves his trapeze, swings through the air and I catch him with a hand-lock, you remember?"

"Yes. In that exchange I catch his trapeze when he leaves it. But how does the 'accident' happen?"

"Simple. I do not catch Tony. I miss his hands by just a little bit. It

is very unfortunate. Everyone is very sorry. But Tony is falling to the ground and it is too late to do anything about it."

"Won't someone suspect?"

"Not likely. As we left his tent I noticed that he was about to take a drink. He might take two or three. He is shocked, nervous. People will notice this and when he falls they will decide that he made the mistake of taking too much drink. If no one happens to notice that he has been drinking, *we* can remind them of it. The plan is flawless."

Marie turned her face away and a tremor passed over her.

"I am afraid," she whispered. "Are you sure this is the right thing we are doing?"

"It is the only thing we can do, my sweet," Manrico assured her passionately. "Hurry, now, and dress. We have only a short time."

AN HOUR later the vast main tent was completely filled with a festive crowd. Outside, the stars were visible as a billion pin-pricks of silver light against the mighty black canopy of the sky.

Manrico stood with Marie under the main archway, waiting to file into the center ring. Tony stood a little apart from them, silent and haggard. Not once did he so much as glance at them.

Manrico noticed with satisfaction the flushed face and burning, feverish eyes. Tony had been drinking.

Suddenly the band struck up the march which was their cue. Their appearance was greeted with cheers and laughter from the well-packed stands. Manrico smiled thinly beneath his paint. A clown suit might mean fun and comedy to the spectators but they didn't realize how deceptive were the costumes and grease paint of the Laugh-

ing Carillos this night.

The master of ceremonies introduced them lavishly, and then they were ascending the ladders that led to the trapezes, high above the heads of the crowd, in the tip-top peak of the big top.

Tony and Marie ascended one side and Manrico went up alone. When he reached his platform he tested the trapeze carefully. He glanced down and saw that the net was being removed. That was part of the act. He smiled. Tony would have a nice straight drop—onto the hard-baked earth.

The drums of the band were rumbling a spine-tingling crescendo and the cries of the crowd had faded to a tense, excited murmur.

Manrico looked and saw that Marie had reached her platform which was a dozen feet above Tony's. He waved to her and he could see her white smile.

Tony's face was set in rigid lines, completely devoid of expression. Manrico experienced a grim pleasure from the thought of how that expressionless face would change and writhe when it started downward . . .

After a last check of the trapeze ropes, Manrico swung out into the air. Marie and Tony both stepped from their platforms and swung in sweeping arcs toward him—Marie a dozen feet above his head, Tony exactly parallel.

They swung back and forth gathering momentum while the band below built a pulse-quickenning pillar of sound beneath them. Their first maneuver was actually their climax for it was the most spectacular in their repertoire.

Manrico caught Tony and Marie somersaulted to the trapeze vacated by Tony—that was the trick. It required perfect timing and precision.

Manrico smiled as he swung higher and higher. There was no danger for him in this maneuver. Ordinarily he

caught Tony. Tonight, it was even simpler—for he *wasn't* going to catch Tony.

Two more swings and then Tony would be sailing through the air, hands extended, grasping—

What would he think as he missed and plummeted downward?

There wouldn't be time for thought, Manrico knew.

HE FELL backwards and hung by his knees as he completed the first swing. Above him he could see Marie arcing gracefully downward. Her long, slender body streamed through the air, a vibrant, beautiful poem of motion.

Manrico completed his second swing and his eyes flashed the cue to Marie and Tony. They both nodded imperceptibly and he knew that they were ready.

Tony swung forward to meet him, hanging by his hands. Manrico could see his face clearly. And he saw that Tony was smiling. Smiling exultantly, triumphantly, happily.

Manrico had no time for thought for at that same instant Tony's hands released the trapeze bar—and with a flash of instinctive reckoning Manrico knew that Tony had released the bar a split second too soon, six feet before he should have!

And he was not flying toward Manrico's outstretched hands as he should have been! He was falling swiftly and certainly to the hard-baked earth a

hundred and fifty feet below. And the triumphant, exultant smile was radiant on his face as he dropped.

It happened too quickly for thought. But quicker than thought were Manrico's instinctive reflexes. And even as Tony started to fall, his horrified eyes flashed up to Marie's trapeze and a shout of warning clawed at his throat.

For Marie had left her trapeze and was dropping in a graceful, soaring arc to Tony's trapeze—Tony's trapeze which his deliberate fall had thrown six feet out of place.

The full import of Tony's act crashed into Manrico's brain with the speed of light. There was no time to think, less in which to act.

Marie was falling through the air—and Tony's trapeze was swinging tantalizingly away from her clawing fingers.

With cat-like quickness Manrico grabbed his trapeze bar with one hand, slipped his knees from the bar and swung forward in a desperate lunge.

His free hand caught Marie about the waist as she hurtled by—and his other hand tore away from the trapeze with a savage wrench.

Marie's shrill scream beat at his ears and her arms clutched about his waist as they fell.

The cards had not lied.

They were to have each other's arms until death parted them.

And Manrico had been wrong about one thing. There *was* time to think on the way down.

« TAXPAYER'S UTOPIA »

WITH new taxes being imposed every day and old taxes being increased, it is indeed a pleasure to hear about a city that imposes no taxes on its citizens. In fact, the city not only does not tax its citizens but gives them a free municipal railway, free telephone service, fine schools without tuition, and a free lending library.

This seemingly impossible city is called Orson, a small Swedish town. It seems that many years

back the inhabitants of Orson had the foresight to plant trees wherever they could find a plot of ground. Now the city enjoys a sufficient income from the sale of young trees and timber to defray all city expenses as well as give the people many free services. Moreover, the present citizens of Orson have been very careful to replace all the trees they remove thus insuring their children and other future generations a taxless existence.

« INSECT CHIVALRY »

ALTHOUGH the female grasshopper cannot be sure where her husband is going to be since he jumps from one place to another, she can be sure that he will always be around to protect her should danger approach. For according to several noted entomologists, the male grasshopper will disregard any thought of his own safety in order to protect the female.

The males of the species are smaller and much more agile than their mates. They are also more brightly colored and thus more easily seen. When danger presents itself, the females immediately hide while the males jump this way and that

and perform all sorts of gymnastics in order to attract attention. If the female finds it necessary to move from one hiding place to another by jumping, her action is immediately covered up by the increased activity of the male.

Grasshoppers, moreover, both male and female, have been unjustly classed as crop destroyers because a few members of the species feed on crops or harm cattle grazing by destroying the grass on the range. Well over 95% of the grasshoppers are either beneficial to the farmer and cattle men by eating truly harmful insects or are neutral in that they neither harm nor benefit crops.

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EACH

THE SCARLET ROLLERS

(Continued from page 57)

cret anti-Junthau organization. And she made some startling suggestions, which, when furthered by some suggestions of my own, began to open up new vistas of daring, danger and adventure—vistas as alluring as they were terrifying.

By the time our two hours were over, we had made a secret compact—a compact which I would gladly have sealed with something more than a meeting of the hands, had she not prevented by brushing past me with an elfin agility and disappearing down the stairs.

VI

THE tunnel was steep and narrow.

The hastily erected roof-supporting timbers seemed too frail for their mighty burden. The passages were dark as a tomb except where they were stabbed by our flashlights. The air was hot and fetid. Yet the six of us labored intently. Outside, we knew, the sky was lighted by the early morning stars, though here all times were as one.

At my side, working as energetically as a man as we lengthened the tunnel, stood a fair companion. The other four toilers were men, whom she addressed as "Comrades"—Comrades of the Trepidum. All of us knew that we were taking a desperate chance. From time to time we paused, and our electrical sounding devices served as our ears. There was a side gallery up which we could flee, for if the Makalo caught us here, this tunnel would be our tomb!

For ten nights already, equipped with noiseless electrical drilling gear, we had been laboring. Tonight, if all went well, we would complete the work. We had bored our tunnel to within a few inches of the great cavern where the Martians were lodged. At one place the needle-point of a drill had already pierced the wall; and peering through with a periscope device, we could see hundreds of the spherical monsters rolling in an electrically lighted corridor, or torpidly lying amid masses of coppery wheels and spring-bearing machines like gigantic mouse-traps.

Our plans were comparatively simple, and Helva deserves the greater part of the credit. While I had been the one to suggest flooding the Martians' dwelling-place, it was she who proposed tapping the city's water supply, since there was no lake or river near at hand. In order to accomplish this purpose, it was necessary to call in her comrades of the Trepidum, who could obtain the necessary machinery. With their aid, we had not only dug the tunnel, but had wired it, so that the pressure of a button from above would touch off two sticks of dynamite: one bursting the central water main at the top of the tunnel, and the other opening the tunnel at its lower end, so that the floods could pour down upon the Martians.

NOW that the project was nearing completion, we were worn down by anxiety, weariness, and loss of sleep. For we had necessarily continued working as usual at the Red House; and had slipped away each night to the tunnel, returning just before dawn. Admit-

(Continued on page 230)

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READER'S PAGE

LOUSY!—BRIGHT SPOTS

Sirs:

I have been reading *FANTASTIC ADVENTURES* for over a year now, and I think that it is the best little bundle of fantasy on the market. I have finished your May issue and boy, was it lousy! All that bunk about daughters of snake gods and holy cities of Mars. Foo! However, there were some bright spots; for instance, the cover, by Malcolm Smith. Boy, was it a killer. I also thought the cover by him on the June issue was grand. Another bright spot was "Made-moiselle Butterfly," by Don Wilcox. Gee, he's a man after my own heart! Let's have more covers and stories by Smith and Wilcox.

Some of the best fantasy stories I've read in your mag are: "The Return of Circe" (excellent). "Queen of the Living Puppets" (more power to Wilcox). The Ebttide Jones series (swell). The Oscar, the Martian Detective series (we don't hear enough from James Norman). "Dwellers of the Deep" (there's that Wilcox boy again). "The Living Dead" (I rate Burroughs along with Wilcox). "Rainbow of Death" (all I need to say is "Wilcox"). I also thought "The Giant from Jupiter," and "Cupid Takes a Holiday" were above the average. On the whole, you have the best fantasy mag I ever read. (And I've read lots of them too!) I like your giant size because I can read and reread one by the time the next issue is on the stands. Also your group of authors are excellent, and power to them. I'll be eagerly awaiting my copy of the May issue way down here "deep in the heart of Texas."

JACKIE RAINS,
516 E. Browning,
Pampa, Texas.

It's easy to see what you like, and you'll get plenty of it. We hope you'll forgive us if we veer away from your favorite kind of story once in a while. We certainly appreciate your loyalty!—Ed.

RENTFROW OF THE ARMY

Sire:

I am one of many soldiers that read your magazine. It's a swell pastime and naturally we read for pleasure only. It burned me up when I read of requests for serials. Long stories along with shorts are good. That's swell, just what we want. We want to pick up a magazine to our taste, read it and put it down entertained and satisfied. How on earth can a person be satisfied when they

are left dangling on the suspense of a continued story??? I've asked soldiers in different camps from Calif. to the East and I always get the same answer. We hate serials!!!! In fact, I never have met a real live person face to face that does. I know there actually are a few of them in the U.S.

I've read F.A. for a long time along with other like magazines. I always look on the magazine rack for complete stories. I turn to the end of a story and if even just one story has at the last page—(to be continued)—back goes the magazine. I don't want it. I look for a magazine to give me the entertainment I want. Complete—satisfying. That is the way most of us want them. If you must have serials, how about publishing a separate magazine with only serials in it. That way you won't spoil a darn good magazine and also satisfy those self-torturists, continued story readers.

As far as finding fault with pictures and stories, I just don't. I could pick your F.A. to pieces for "boners" like some of your readers do. If I didn't want to overlook those petty faults, I just wouldn't bother to read your magazine. Sure, I know you want suggestions, and that other readers are trying to help, but, after all, these are fantastic stories, and after all I could take most every mag., book, and newspaper ever written and find fault with it. In "Giant from Jupiter" the picture has a giant standing beside a smashed



"This H. G. Wells is utterly fantastic"

space ship and there is a warship alongside. In the story this isn't what happened. So what!!!!

The only suggestions I care to give are ones that I feel would be the kind that you intended reader's page for, rather than technical fault finding. "Quest in Time"—4 bells. Let's have more like it. O'Brien's story this month, "June Issue," is what I call a good fantastic, a good stunt. That's the kind to have once in a while. Not too often though. There are stories that aren't so good, but the same author comes out with a real hit the next time or two. I don't call down an author for a "bad" one. They can't all be worth a million dollars. Same thing with your artists.

Really, Ed, your F.A. is a darn good magazine and it just burned me up to read some of those "literature bombs" on Reader's Page. They aren't worth the ink to print. Most of them are

good, I admit. The only agreement, and I mean only; I have with a certain one, "Tommy-Gun Thompson" is, let's have more scientific science fiction. In fact, every story should have a reasonable base somewhere in it. The more actual possibilities, the bigger the fantastic part goes over.

I'll always read your F.A.'s along with the rest of your fans as long as the stories are complete. I want to keep on reading F.A. Please don't put any nasty old serials in it.

ROSS F. RENTEROW,
74th M. Sqdn.,
Stockton Field, Calif.

...Our serials are very, very infrequent. Also, we have on hand several novels which we intend to run complete. You'll go for that, we're sure.—Ed.

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LEFTY FEET—NO. 1

Sirs:

After reading this issue of FANTASTIC ADVENTURES I have something to say on it. It was well up to standard. I say up to standard because I think its regular standard is almost impossible to beat. And so—to chop it off quick I'll make my list. The stories are in order of their rating.

1. The Weird Doom of Floyd Scrilch
2. Duncan's Dreadful Doll
3. The Mystery of Shaft 13
4. Headlines For Tod Shane
5. The Eagle Man
6. Men Scared of Nothing
7. The Traitor
8. The Return of the Hun

RODNEY PALMER,
226 W. 60th St.,
Chicago, Ill.

This letter is typical of many coming in, which place Robert Bloch's great new character in first place. Once again humor scores in our pages.—Ed.

SURREALISM!

Sirs:

The cover of your July ish was only fair (at first glance I mistook it for surrealism!) but I feel that this was more than made up for by the swell variety of stories.

Here is how I would rate them:

"The Eagle Man"—exciting and different,

"The Mystery of Shaft 13"—*weird* but plausible,

"The Traitor"—vividly portrayed; I like Harris' style,

"Weird Doom of Floyd Scrilch"—lots of good laughs and a truly *fantastic* story,

"Return of the Hun"—intriguing—but I would have ended it differently,

"Headlines for Tod Shayne"—thrilling,

"Hokum Hotel"—thoroughly enjoyable reading,

"Men Scared of Nothing"—good but don't give us too many like this,

"Safari to the Lost Ages"—I don't particularly care for time travel stories; I don't see how it can be done,

"Vitality for Murder"—a little gruesome but not too bad on the whole,

"Duncan's Dreadful Doll"—this story seems out of place in an S. F. mag.

The articles were all good—as always. Why not try Magarian on the cover? His work on the inside illustrations look o.k.

CORPORAL CARL ROSS,
H. Q. Battery, 157th F. A. Bn.,
A.P.O. 44,
Fort Lewis, Wash.

Once more, we repeat, FA isn't a science fiction magazine. It is fantasy, as closely as we can define it. Actually we think we've got something new under the sun in FA.—Ed.

NEITHER

Sirs:

According to the Editor's Notebook, we, the fans, are going to have a hard time telling which



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author—Williams or O'Brien—is going to be the best in the issue. I'll bet you'd *never* guess which without help, so here's the answer:

NEITHER!

Absolutely the best story in the issue is "The Kid from Kalamazoo." What a style! What a character! What an idea! What a STORY!

"Well, you say, weakly, "Then which of our two favorites gets *second* place?"

And the answer is again—NEITHER!

Number Two story is—"The Mental Gangster," by Thornton Ayre. The air-raids don't seem to have dimmed our English correspondent's halo at all. More! Especially, dear Ed., since friend Thornton is finally learning how to handle U. S. slang and make it sound as if it grew here. One minor fault: people like Rays Walford, Mr. Ayre, do not employ the term "shan't," especially when about to die, if they come from America.

And here is where Ye Ed begins to blush. Number three, "The Little Man Who Wasn't All There," by Robert Bloch—keep Feep busy, please; his invariable use of the present tense is quite fascinating.

Number Four, "Mr. Ames' Devil," by August W. Derleth. A fascinating little bit.

And finally, at No. 5—"The Son of Death." Swell, but too short.

Number Six: "The Luck of Enoch Higgins."

Number Seven: "Creegar Dares to Die;" cheer up, Mr. Editor, it had swell characterization, anyway.

Number Eight: "Tink Takes Command." With hopes of new adventures of these characters, I give them the four-star rating—which certainly makes this a good issue, believe you me!

Last and least: "The Daughter of Thor." And even this can't exactly be classed as a *dud*; Hamilton rarely can be, anyway.

A very, very good issue, Mr. Editor; you are to be complimented. There's nothing really stupendous in the issue, but there are no flops, either, as there frequently are, I am forced to inform you.

The cover is a remarkable piece of work; it doesn't look like much until you study it, and then it seems to "grow on you." But why, oh, why, must swell covers like this be practically smothered in print? The original of this ought to bring a high price at the Pacificon, if it's held.

And a bunch of orchids for making the back cover into some thing useful instead of a vehicle for false teeth, athlete's foot, salesmen, and Charles (ex-97-pound-weaking-who-became-the-world's-most-perfectly-developed-man) Atlas. By the way, speaking of Atlas, that "Joe Stronghorse" take-off in last month's Lefty Feep episode was great.

Here's where the compliments stop coming.



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SEPTEMBER ISSUE

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Those illustrations—ohhhhhhhhhhhhh . . .

"Daughter of Thor" wasn't too bad, nor "Tink Takes Command." But that Flash Gordon thing for "The Mental Gangster"—ugh! And an author as good as Derleth deserves better than what you choose to give him, too.

Number 1 for "Creegar": almost worth looking at twice. It is spoiled by the guy's super-Buck-Rogers costume; sure, Creegar got a new suit of clothes, but an ex-convict on a smuggling ship doesn't usually get a cape and riding boots. The other pictures weren't so good, although the one on page 90 *might* be passed by the Board of Health.

And that thing for "Son of Death!" OUCH! Not only was it a refugee from "Mammoth Detective," but even there I am confident it would have been turned down. The Art Editor must have been asleep. Why couldn't you have given us, say, a picture of Thordon—or the ship—or Toro—or Doc Holm in the lab, about to do his dirty work—or almost *anything* but that scene. It stinks, quite frankly; there is no need to get "confidential" on that one.

The one for Tanner's short: better than any preceding it, which isn't saying much. The one for Lefty Feep's adventure: best in the issue, which is also saying nothing at all. As for the one for "Kid From Kalamazoo;" it is another reject from "Mammoth Detective"—or ought to be.

Come on, Ed., you can do a lot better than that. What's happened to all your illustrators worthy of the name? Come on, how about giving us, next issue, a dose of: Finlay, Paul, Morey, Magarian—or even Jay Jackson? And tell Ned Hadley to please snap out of the doldrums as he *can* do good stuff—even great stuff at times, witness "Return of Hawk Carse."

Just one more request: give Hamilton a shot of adrenalin, or something. "Daughter of Thor," while very readable, was also a very horrible letdown after "The Quest in Time," one of Ed's better tales—or rather, one of his best—for F. A.

Until Lefty Feep runs out of tall tales,

PAUL CARTER,
156 S. University St.,
Blackfoot, Idaho.

When you go into detail on our illustrations, you challenge us personally, and we have to answer—although how satisfactory the answer will be, we don't know. Just as we were preparing your letter for publication, the art director came into our office with a Ned Hadley drawing for "The Scarlet Rollers." He showed us where this illustration simply could not be used, because the hero of the story was pictured as an ugly, pug-nosed, bull-jawed fellow, far from handsome. We protested that the hero in the story looked that way, and the artist drew him true to life. But willy-nilly, illustrations must have handsome faces on the character. So, your editor just sinks back and groans, because he can't change the story (even if it weren't already in print); so every

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month we get letters like yours telling us we ought to read our own stories, and get the illustrations somewhere near the true picture. We suppose the real answer is to have our authors refrain from characterization. If you'll glance at the illustration for the story just mentioned, then read the story, you'll see what we mean. As for what happened to our artists, nothing. We just have many more of them for greater variety. You'll begin to compliment them as they get used to their new jobs!—Ed.

CONTEST WINNER

Sirs:

When are we going to find out who won that "Giant From Jupiter" contest?

FRANK W. JERREMS,
1415 Montclare Ave.,
Pittsview, Ark.

Oops! We knew we were forgetting something? Well, the winner (to whom we have mailed \$5.00 as per our Editor's Notebook contest) was Victor King, 711 S. Arch Street, Aberdeen, South Dakota. And believe it or not, there were five other entries! We wonder, maybe those two writers were up a stump when we asked them to incorporate that illustration into the story!—Ed.

THE SCARLET ROLLERS

(Continued from page 224)

tedly, this was hazardous in the extreme; but we knew a secret entrance at the rear of the Red House, where no guard was posted; and thus far we had escaped detection.

At last the work was completed. I took one final look through the periscope, before giving the signal to evacuate the tunnel and touch off the dynamite. As I did so, I uttered a gasp. What had happened to the Scarlet Rollers? Like animated tops, they were spinning and whirling about, apparently in intense excitement. Some spun to the right, some to the left, some rolled back and forth like billiard balls

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struck by invisible cues, bounding and rebounding from the wall of the gallery. Were they doing the Martian equivalent of our "daily dozen"? Or had they gone crazy?

I had my answer when I saw one of them pausing in the midst of his convolutions, and pointing wildly in our direction with one of his squirming midget hands. Evidently they had observed the periscope!

The next instant, some of the copery cavern wheels began to revolve and a flash of flame shot in our direction. I barely had time to leap back before the rock wall, which separated us from the cavern, came crashing down with a thunderous roar. Then, while Helva screamed, there came a still more savage detonation, which momentarily stunned me. As I picked myself up, painfully bruised, I realized that the Martian bolt had set off the dynamite with which we had expected to break open the wall!

Almost at the same instant, I realized something else—something more ominous still. A long hollow crashing, from somewhere far above, resounded in my ears. "Quick! For God's sake, hurry!" I cried, as, wildly pushing Helva, I started for the exit.

The dynamite charge, which had just gone off, was connected by wire with the explosive that was to demolish the city water main. The first blast had been intended to touch off the second—and, in fact, had done so! Thousands of tons of water were bearing down upon us in a mile-a-minute torrent!

I well knew that there was only a matter of seconds between us and sudden death. My companions, too, understood that we were in peril of being caught, rat-like, in the trap we had set. In those few breathless instants, we lived through lifetimes of terror. Up, up we dashed, toward the perpendicular tunnel with the ropeladder that offered

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our one avenue of escape. A new roaring was in our ears—a droning that rapidly grew louder. Then we had reached the side-tunnel. We shoved Helva up, and knew that she was climbing through the darkness, climbing to safety. One by one our companions hoisted themselves after her. I was the last in line. But just as I grasped at the ropes, a solid sheet of water, striking like a battering-ram, whirled over my feet.

VII

FOR some time, after coming to the surface, we did not venture into the streets. Had the Makalo not perhaps unearthed our plot? Might they not be lying in wait for us? Nevertheless, despite my comrade's urgent warnings, I volunteered to go forth; and eventually emerged into the open, side by side with Helva, who insisted on accompanying me.

It was already morning. To our relief, the streets were deserted. But we were aware of a peculiar pungent odor, as of brimstone; and a continual distant booming, as of artillery, sounded in our ears. What could it mean? Was a bombing raid in progress?

But no! As we stood waiting, with the premonition of something portentous, the tumult of a multitude came to our ears. A moment later, with wild cries, scores of men and women burst around a turn, closely pursued by the round whirling form of a Martian, who, as he rolled forward, shot out flashes of purple flame from the many orifices of his body. And several of the fugitives, struck by these flashes, collapsed as if mowed down by cannon fire.

Fascinated, we watched, without thought for our own safety, while Helva pressed close to me, breathing heavily. A deep rumbling, from another direction, had caught our ears; and, to our

astonishment, an armored tank shot into view, rattling furiously toward the Martian, while from its batteries flashes of white light spurted at the enemy.

I was never to know the outcome of this discharge. For at this point our comrades, who had come up unobserved by us, began pulling at us so urgently that we had to follow them back into the depths.

There we remained for hours, while the thundering of attack and counter-attack sounded and by degrees died down. What had produced this sudden new war?

Not for some time were we to have our answer. The mystery only deepened when, later in the day, we left our retreat, and wandered through battle-scarred and deserted streets, with the pavements shell-riddled and many of the buildings scorched and in ruins. Reaching the Red House, we received our greatest surprise of all. This magnificent edifice, the headquarters of Junthau, was nothing more than a smoldering mass of rubble!

VIII

EVEN yet, we did not rejoice. It was only after five days that the full reassuring facts came to light—only after the Trepidum had raised its flag over the central square of Rosol, had proclaimed a democratic government, and had sued for peace with the United Americas.

Then, through information obtained from scores of scattered sources, the story was gradually pieced together. The Martians had been caught by surprise by the floods poured into their galleries. A frightful panic had ensued, during which some of them had been crushed to death, many more had been splashed by the water and had perished, and a few had escaped. It was the latter who had been responsible for the street fighting. Believing that Junthau

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had double-crossed them and released the floods with a murderous treachery, they had set out to avenge their dead companions, had attacked all human beings they could find, and had blasted the Red House and other government buildings with the terrible weapons that, hitherto, had been used exclusively for Junthau's benefit. In the first surprise onslaught, the dictator and all his ministers had been caught and slain, though not before he had given orders to attack the Scarlet Rollers with tanks and machine-guns, through which the assailants, a mere half dozen in number, were ultimately annihilated and their weapons destroyed.

Thus our plot had succeeded beyond our hopes. In one deadly stroke, we had wiped out the Martians and the Martians' human collaborators. And the war, therefore, not only ended with the triumphant success of the United Americas, but brought honor and acclaim to Helva and myself, who were jointly recognized as the authors of the unexpected victory.

A few weeks later, when I stood in Washington to receive the Congressional Medal from the hands of General Thorndike, my bride was at my right hand, beaming. "You too should have a Congressional Medal," I whispered.

She bent gracefully toward me, with that whimsical sweet smile which I had come to value more than all the honors on earth, and murmured, "It is quite enough for me—quite enough to have the Congressional Medal Winner."

I knew that Helva was my real reward, although this was no place in which to express my private sentiments. I was certain that she would never, though we lived fifty years together, accuse me of lack of spunk. And I felt grateful—very grateful for what the Martians had done for me.

THE END

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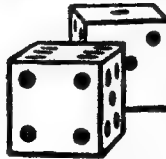
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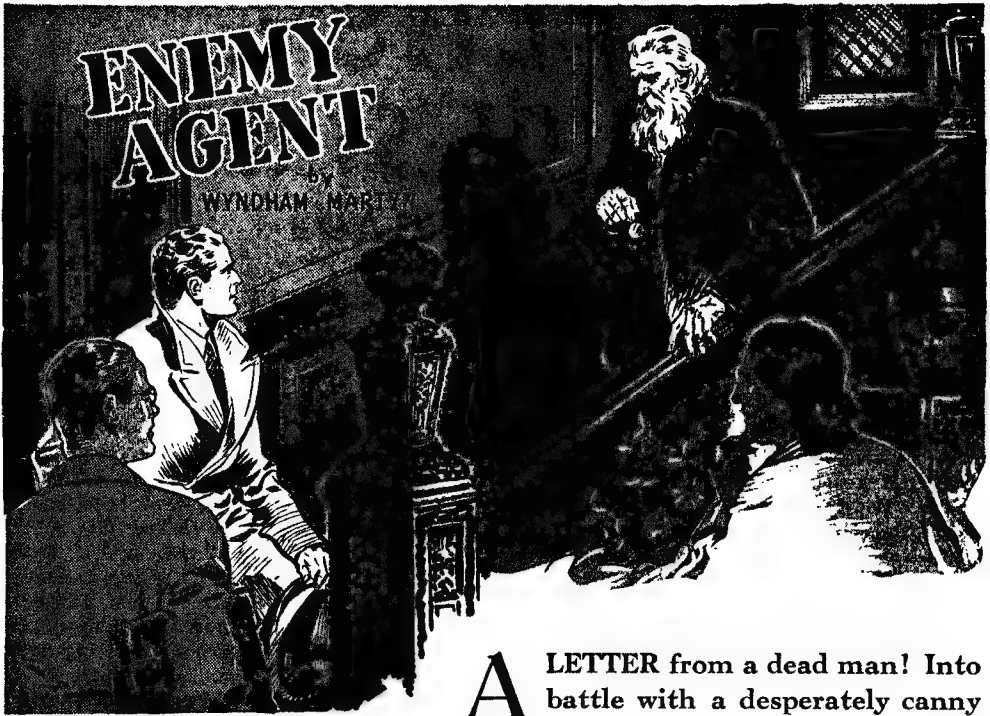
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ATLAS- THE GOD OF STRENGTH

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**On his broad shoulders rests a tremendous
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THE Greeks knew him well. They said he was the son of the Titan, Iapetus, and Clymene (the woman otherwise known as Asia). He was also the brother of Prometheus.

Homer said of him: "He is the one who knows the depths of the whole sea, and keeps the tall pillars which hold heaven and earth asunder."

Insofar as we can determine, Atlas was at first a marine creation. The pillars which he is supposed to have supported rested in the sea, beyond the western horizon. But later, the Greeks moved over that horizon and found no pillars, nor any Atlas, so very discreetly they removed him to a hill in northwest Africa. Here he became known as a king, and got into an altercation with Perseus, who had a rather potent way of getting rid of his enemies—by showing them the head of the Gorgon. This is what he eventually did, and Atlas became a rocky mountain in the Atlas chain, which to this day bears his name.

The altercation between Perseus was caused, claimed Perseus, because Atlas was inhospitable, but this can be discredited somewhat when we realize that Perseus was going about northwest Africa changing everything he had a mind to into stone, using the Gorgon's head as his "fast-freezer." Like all legend, this fantastic story has some basis in fact, although exactly what it is, scientists have not yet determined.

Ancient legend tells us many times of the "giants that were in the Earth in those days." Iapetus was one of the fabled Titans, and Clymene was a giantess, perhaps of Amazonian proportions, although hailing from Asia rather than South America. Atlas, their son, was perhaps the biggest of all the giants in the memory-legend of man.

Actually, we may suppose, he was a huge fellow who ruled over a tribe in what are now the Atlas mountains. He was white, like the Greeks, and this bears out a present-day fact which adds credence to ancient legend. For the Berber tribe, white Africans, lived in these mountains, and still do. The Berbers have been wild, warlike, and independent throughout their history, which goes back even further than the Greek.

It is possible that the Greeks, having fashioned

a giant named Atlas, and given him a location place beyond the western horizon, had to back up their religious belief when they spread out to the region designated and found no pillars and no Atlas. So they picked on the Atlas mountains, and finally more specifically on their king, a huge fellow who was visited by Perseus with his horrid trophy, the Gorgon's head. Whatever mummery Perseus practiced, probably his best trick was changing persons and objects into stone. Atlas, naturally, wouldn't like such a guest, and might have ordered him to depart without supper.

Perseus, always a battler, might have killed the king, and thus made hash of a pet Greek god. Which would naturally lead to Greek propaganda about the king being changed to a mountain, and thus still eligible to worship as a supporter of the pillars of heaven.

The legend of Atlas and his golden apples also might point to a reason for his inhospitality to Perseus. Africa is a land of gold, and the "apples" might well have been huge nuggets which the Berbers had dug up and were then placed in the king's hands for safe-keeping. Perseus, since the Greeks had adopted gold for their ancient coinage, would naturally desire to obtain the apples for his own enrichment. And Atlas could hardly do less than defend his possessions.

Having been saddled with a reputation for strength which he did not deserve, or perhaps never even knew about, Atlas did much to add to the glory of Perseus when he went down to defeat beneath his "secret weapon."

Of all the gods, Atlas seems to be the one most solidly founded in human stock, and one we can actually believe existed as a real human being, and no fanciful creature devised out of whole cloth. It may be possible that scientific expeditions into the Atlas ranges may some day uncover historical evidence among the fierce Berber tribes that will identify this "Greek" hero.

Perhaps then, too, we may discover just what Perseus actually did to him. Certainly it wasn't any such thing as changing him into a mountain.

Meanwhile Atlas adorns our maps and Mercator projections (Mercator used him first in this connection) as the strongest man in history.

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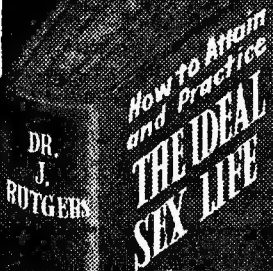


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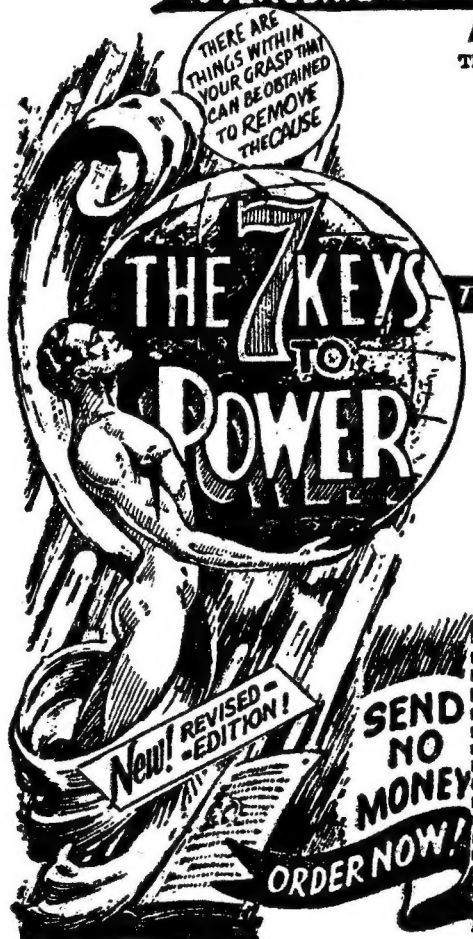
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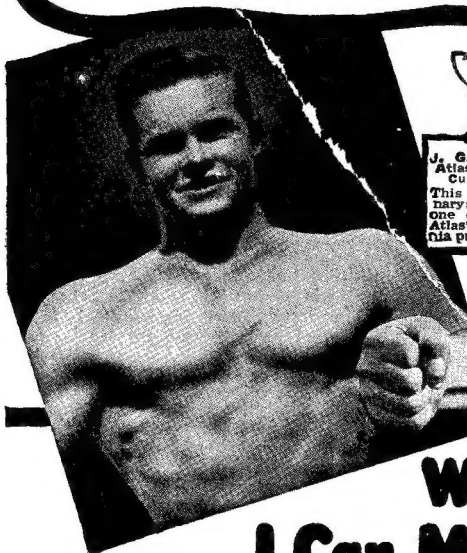
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ATLAS

THE GOD OF STRENGTH

He held the Earth on his shoulders, was the keeper of the sea, and of the pillars of the sky. (See page 238 for story)